

A STRANGE LAND



FELIX RYARK

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BY
FELIX RYARK



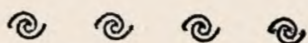
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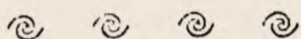
WHEN Denis Maine was aged about thirty, he suddenly found himself alone in the world. He should, perhaps, have been prepared for the discovery, since of late years only one life, unusually thin-spun, had interposed to prevent it ; but it took him by surprise all the same, all the more, indeed, because the very frailness of the screen had made him grow desperately blind to ominous signs, much as a weak-headed traveller on a precipice-skirting footpath might shut his dizzy eyes at some ugly corner. Thus it happened that through one early autumn sunset he returned home from a week-end holiday to find his mother an hour dead. Having learned the fact from the doctor, her maids, and his own bewildered gaze, he reflected upon it for some age-long days

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in the little suburban house, which seemed wide enough to hold all the loneliness of the universe, yet where he touched at every turn a blank, dead wall, blocking his way till he felt for the moment as if he were to be crushed in a contracting chamber. Generally, however, he was conscious chiefly of a boredom profound and pervasive, which sprang from the very roots of existence, and yet formed its stifling atmosphere. This was only natural, seeing that nothing now did, or ever again could, matter at all, while he foresaw clearly how things would nevertheless continue to go on and on, tedious and intolerable, without aim or change or end.

But at times some kind of self-preserving instinct led him to look away from this impossible future, and occupy his mind with the past. In the days when this world had first dawned upon him as only son and youngest child in that small household near the great city, life had not lacked for him the most absorbing interest, pleasurable, on the whole, though not free, of course, from painful incidents. Amongst these none was impressed



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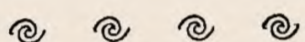
upon his memory more deeply and enduringly than a sight he had met with on a walk taken about the time of his fifth birthday. His maid had conducted him townwards along the banks of a canal, where the polished grey surface of the water was flecked with shrivelled elm-leaves curled into golden shells, floated down from boughs through which the afternoon autumn sun slanted long rays dazzlingly. They came presently to a bridge about which a crowd had gathered, and little Denis was pushed on until all at once he stood on the wet bank close beside a ghastly thing said to be a woman "just brought out of the water, and the Lord knows how long she may have lain in it." The memory of that moment conjured up a spectre of horror, to whose hauntings he remained subject for many a day.

But from this same autumn dated another event which had a far stronger and happier influence upon his life. One afternoon his mother took him, not without misgivings about the probability of his keeping quiet for an hour, to a concert at which he listened, rapt and entranced, while

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a wild-locked, wild-eyed foreigner played marvellously on the violin. As much as a whole week afterwards—and weeks are substantial periods at five years old—Denis woke up at night crying bitterly because he had dreamt that he was playing on the fiddle like the man in the big room, and now remembered that he could do no such thing. Upon this hint his parents got the dreamer music-masters of higher and higher accomplishments, who became more and more amazed at their pupil's progress, until the most distinguished of them at last declared that he had nothing further to learn that could be taught.

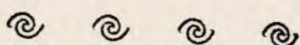
Long before this stage was reached several persons had been anxious to exploit young Denis Maine's gift upon terms which anybody might reasonably have considered altogether advantageous to himself and his family. But he was by no means disposed to entertain them. To play like the man in the big room had from the first been his ambition ; the big room itself and the audience seemed to him disagreeable, but fortunately quite separable accidents. Maturing years only con-



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firmed him in this whim, with which his parents, strangely indeed, entirely sympathised. That he might have been earning thousands of pounds, and was not earning a penny, appeared to him and them of no consequence at all ; an extraordinary view for which their neighbours found a partial explanation in the recognised queerness of the whole Maine family. Queerness of no very positive kind, it is true ; for apart from this buried talent of Denis's, a vaguely felt absence of worldliness and other-worldliness had been all that there was to remark about them. And it is only fair to add that Denis's unwillingness to perform in public was not prompted by any churlish fancy for keeping his pleasure to himself. This appeared plainly from certain facts. He would, for instance, play by the hour—potentially worth many guineas—to a poor old invalid couple of neighbours, who listened with ignorant delight ; and he had been known to execute dance music at a pinch for disappointed school children, who put up with him gleefully until the blasts of the desired brass band were heard, when the feeble,

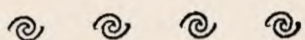
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stop-gap fiddler was promptly and slightly deserted.

Yet though he was commonly considered to have made nothing of his musical genius, Denis himself strove towards its fuller and more perfect expression with an unwearied patience and labour, an unflagging enthusiasm and delight, that could have been increased by no hankering after fame or fortune. His life-long study and practice met with only two memorable interruptions. The first happened when he was about nine years old. His twin sisters, Kitty and Marjory, by two years his elders, were seized by a fever, which carried off Kitty in a few days, and left Marjory to mope and droop with a clouded brain for a little while before she too was taken. During those sad months Denis's beloved violin lay neglected in its case, as silent as the piano on which the twins had been so proud to play his accompaniments. He thought he would never care to touch it again ; but of course he did after a time.

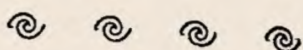
His age was nearly doubled before his next interruption befell him, a longer and more serious



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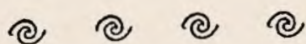
one. It was caused by the discovery that his father showed symptoms of a lingering but incurable malady ; whereupon Denis, in his despair, grasped at the wild expedient of studying medicine, in hopes of thus enabling himself to discover a remedy. His natural capacity for the science was as small as his aversion from all the details of the necessary studies was great ; nevertheless he threw himself into the attempt with a desperate zeal that would not be baffled or repulsed by the most strenuous opposition of body and mind. For twelve long months he worked in the schools, frequenting laboratory and lecture-room, hospital-ward and examination-hall, beyond their tedium and toil and nightmare horrors endeavouring to see a dim and distant gleam. Music had vanished out of his life like an occulted star. But one evening when he returned home from a gruesome day at dissections, he found that his future patient had taken a sudden turn for the worse ; and in one week's time he had gone past the reach of any earthly cure. Denis, thus thrust out of a self-doomed prison, was before very long lured

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back by his mother into his own magic domain, and for ten years more he dwelt in it unmolested.

Now after this last and final bereavement he would perhaps in any case sooner or later have sought the same refuge ; but his mother, again, had taken steps to ensure his doing so ere he had wandered far in utterly waste and desolate places. Among her papers was a packet to be opened within the fortnight after her death ; and its contents he found were a letter enclosing a melody of her own composition, arranged in a very masterly way. This surprised him much, because she had never displayed more than moderate skill and knowledge as a musician, and had allowed him to believe her incapable of appreciating the more learned and scientific developments of the art. But the letter explained that she had done this of a set purpose, lest, if she had associated herself closely with his musical studies, he should miss her all the more ; and it went on, with a touch of pride, to tell him how she had secretly kept up with him all the way, and as a proof of her attainments had composed an air for his

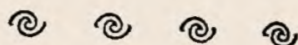


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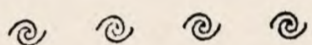
violin. Then she expressed a wish that would ensure his touching his instrument without delay ; and its case, once opened, she doubtless well knew would never be permanently closed again. Her request was that he would play over the air at sunset on seven consecutive evenings ; and, sure enough, the bow was soon sliding between his fingers. Perhaps he had never played anything with such extreme delight. It began and ended with a slumbrous melody, lulling and soft ; but this was only, it seemed to him, the sleep that enfolded a most vivid and lovely little dream, for to that alone could he liken the melody within a melody of the central movement. For many more than seven days it was his chief solace ; and, as Elizabeth Maine had foreseen, it led him straight back to his music, which he might otherwise have lacked the energy to resume.

But it could not, of course, charm away the forlornness of his plight, which he presently began to think might be in some degree mended by departure from a place where everything he saw reminded him mechanically that everybody else

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was gone. The main obstacle to his setting out was his wish to go nowhere in particular, a place whither it is impossible to travel by any route. Listless inertness has almost unlimited powers of procrastination ; yet, on the other hand, the motive power of trifles is sometimes irresistible, and one day several of these combined to give him a shove. He had gone in the afternoon to play for his old couple, whom he had not visited for a month or two. Because things are utterly dismal, he said to himself, with a huge effort, shall they miss their little bit of diversion ? This magnanimous sentiment was not, however, rewarded by much appearance of pleasure on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Linders. In fact, the old man sat through the performance gloomily, and at its close merely nodded his head so ambiguously that he might as well have been understood to express relief as approbation, while his wife's demeanour was constrained and frigid. Neither of them suggested a repetition of Denis's visit. This was so unlike their usual manner that he thought he must have stumbled on some unpropitious hour or



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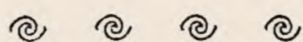
mood, until at the door Mrs. Linders pursued him with a furtive explanation: "My husband, poor man, he's grown terribly hard of hearing since you were here last, Mr. Maine. It's come upon him sudden-like, and it isn't one word in ten he catches, nor he could scarce notice if the band was full blast outside the window. He's very disheartened over it, sir. So you see, my dear, I wouldn't be tantalising him with saying a great deal about the music—lovely it is—but we can't expect to have the enjoyment of such things these times; and twenty thousand thanks to you all the same," said the loyal little old woman, peering up at him wistfully with eyes still clear and blue in their setting of parrot-like wrinkles.

On his homeward way this small incident helped to compound his melancholy. The weather was east-windy, leaden-skied, and swirling with dust, unseasonably adding the bleak unrest of March to the sullen apathy of November. Generally speaking it was a quiet, empty road; but that afternoon brought it more traffic than usual. Near Denis's gate a hearse passed him,

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trotting briskly back from a funeral. It had shiny black panels and quivering plumes, which suggested the wing-cases and antennae of some monstrous beetle. Coming towards him he saw a procession of theological students from an adjacent seminary, walking three and three, after their kind, in long, black dressing-gowns. A beggar, blind and crippled, was creeping under the wall. Somewhere close by a German band was playing violently, while a child in a perambulator wailed a shrill accompaniment, irked by its nurserymaid's halt to gape and listen. There was a suburban dreariness about it all which suddenly struck Denis as being a not inevitable feature in his lot. Surely he could at least get out of the reach of such things. And a few days later he set off with that intent.

The wintry season motioned him southward, so that he presently came into sunshine, under the cordial influence of which his benumbed energy stirred anew—to his sorrow at first, since it groped vainly for an object. But after a while the love of roving began to grow upon him, and

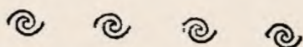


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soon possessed him with the eagerness of a passion supervening rather late in life. Nobody could well have had fuller scope for indulging it. His means were sufficient, his tastes were simple, his health was robust, and his baggage consisted chiefly of his violin and a few small books. Home ties he had none.

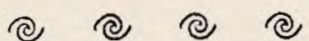
Wandering desultorily and deviously, the trend of his travel was on the whole south-eastward, and in about twelve months from his starting had brought him to a seldom-visited region bordering on Cambodia. It was a land of forests, where in the most solitary places he came upon marvellous temples, with rows of dancing elephants supporting a roof all carved over with great calm faces, or fantastic columns surrounding the slumber of a colossal stone bull. Here he was stricken down by fever, and lay helpless for weeks in a tiny bamboo hut, struggling back to more spacious quarters at last by virtue of a strong constitution and a benevolent native, who supplied him with water and fruit and grain when he grew hungry again. His recovery being slow and somewhat

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dreary, he was not sorry to leave the scene of it. So as soon as possible he parted from his kind acquaintance, with unintelligible signs of gratitude, as a commentary on which he added, at no small inconvenience, a very serviceable penknife. Then he made his way through the forest to the coast, where he took up his abode for a time.

One morning he set forth to walk along the strand towards a small cluster of huts, which were dimly discernible on a silvery-rimmed, swarded promontory at no great distance. It was greater, though, than he had supposed, and there were many pleasant resting-places on the way beneath shady boughs, when the sea-breeze dispersed the cloud of mosquitoes ; and once, having played himself to sleep with the Dream melody, he woke up to find the afternoon so far advanced that he could not expect to arrive in the hamlet before nightfall. This caused him to reconsider his plans. He knew that the inhabitants of such a hamlet strongly disapproved of strange, nocturnal visitors, and had summary methods of dealing with them, which seemed to

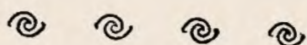


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suggest postponement. But then a natural reluctance to let I dare not wait upon I would, which is really the gist of precepts of prudence, inclined him to continue his journey. No third course was apparent.

As he sat meditating, however, and measuring the indented line of glowing silver sands against the remaining hours of burning golden sunlight, which would be so abruptly turned off about six o'clock, his eye was caught by something afloat close to the shore, a few hundred yards away. It looked like a boat, he thought, and a boat it proved to be, drifting in on the tide along with the dull-green weeds and many-hued jelly-fish, and like them, to all appearances, ownerless. A very small canoe it was, of primitive pattern, but shapely enough, and dry and seaworthy, with a coffee-coloured sail neatly furled. Only a few wading steps were needed to secure it, and as Denis overhauled it the idea occurred to him that a voyage in it would be a shorter way of approaching the village than on foot along the curved and creek-fissured strand. Approach

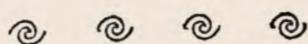
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by water, too, would give him a better opportunity for reconnoitring and judging with what sort of reception he was likely to meet. Therefore, as a fair wind favoured the project, he lost no time in putting off.

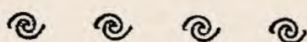
Denis found the voyage enjoyable. His seamanship was not profound, but only the plainest of plain sailing tested it, and steering seemed so easy a task that he had ample leisure to appreciate the freshness of the soft air which bulged the square of brown matting, and the gentle rocking motion and silken murmur as it drew the shallow keel steadily across sapphire levels. In fact it was all rather perilously soothing; and before long he forgot to mind what should have been particularly his own business and fell fast asleep.

He woke with a start to the impression that his nap must have lasted for hours, by such a deep obscurity was he surrounded. But he speedily perceived that this was not the case, for sunshine still blazed on the water behind him. The darkness which lay immediately about him was due to a great black shadow thrown by



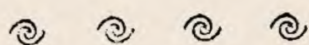
something ahead. What this might be he could not at once make out. A bank of murky mist there was undoubtedly, but whether it veiled any more substantial mass its very denseness forbade him to determine. He scarcely thought that a mere wall of vapour could look so portentously sable and solid ; still he failed to catch sight of anything else. The fact that the boat was swiftly nearing it made the question of its substance an urgent one, and he stared his hardest for an answer. After some minutes' baffled observation certainty came to him through a drifting fold, which gave him a momentary glimpse of black rock, sleek and steep, towering high aloft, though crest as well as base remained invisible. This discovery seemed to him of serious import. His nautical skill was, as has been observed, but scanty, and did not provide him with any better means of avoiding a collision than the prompt striking of his sail. As he set about it, however, he found that a sudden shift of the wind was beginning to waft him along in a course parallel to the vast fog-and-rock bank, for the end of which he kept on looking

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out ahead. But it stretched on and on, and when, after some half-hour's swift sailing the breeze dropped down, leaving him motionlessly becalmed, he saw the grim wall still extending out of sight with never a break. It was to be hoped, he said to himself, that the wind might get up again in a quarter that would carry him back into the sunshine rather than strand him on this forbidding shore.

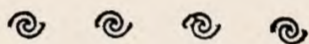
Meanwhile, to beguile the waiting time he took up his violin and began to play. Presently his music wandered, as it generally did, into the Sleep and Dream melody ; and he afterwards remembered that he was about half through it when a strange sight arrested him. On the dark wall directly fronting him appeared a golden gleam, which at first seemed hardly more than an illuminated pinhole, but which grew as rapidly as sparks fretting a black wraith of burnt paper, and in a minute had expanded into a star of dazzling sunlight. Evidently the mist was drifting off some veiled gap in the huge cliff. Denis, who had stopped playing to look on, saw that it was, in



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fact, cleft from top to bottom by a wedge-shaped fissure, the narrower end of which pointed towards him. Through this crevice the rays of the low sun flashed like a fiery sword-thrust, and in at it a strong current was setting. The almost motionless boat began to feel the tug of it. Her aimless creepings to and fro were changed for a steadily quickening movement in the direction of the channel, and Denis, nothing loth, perceived that this was likely to be the next stage of his voyage. He could have wished, indeed, for a wider water-way. Often enough he had traversed such hand's breadth alleys, in eastern cities, where tall houses lean over to shut out the chink of sky ; yet these dark, doorless walls were more inhospitable than theirs, and would certainly afford him no asylum in case of mishap. That seemed far from improbable in view of the foamy tumbling and jostling about the straitened entrance, with glimpses of a yet wilder turmoil beyond. But it would be a short passage anyhow, he said to himself, as he became aware with some pleasurable excitement that he had steerage way enough to

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make for the opening, which he promptly did. At the moment when he passed within it the whole fabric suddenly thrilled with a strange, faint azure glow ; and, as suddenly, across his mind glanced a half-forgotten rhyme :

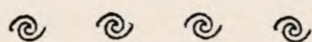
*And what is Music? Then answered Fate :
A creaking of the Wonder-Gate,
That opes to a mortal soon or late.*



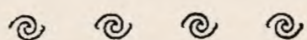
DENIS'S recollections of what followed remained always confused and vague, because he was no sooner within the straits than, seized and swayed by the tumult of their surges, culminating in a mad whirlpool, which spun the little boat round in a place where it had barely room for such evolutions, and then shot it forth, as an athlete sends the brandished weight, scudding straight and swift through air that hissed and whistled. Such was the force of the impetus that, when the pace slackened sufficiently for observations, he found himself far out amid smooth waters, with the murky, shrouded cliff-wall towering an incredibly long way behind him, grim and apparently interminable.

But he seldom glanced back at it, his attention being drawn by the land that lay before him, steeped in sunshine, with a coast-line curved about

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a long, oval bay. He was already near enough to have a clear view of it ; and never had he looked upon so inviting a strand. Woodland and grassland came softly down long slopes, or spread in level spaces to the very edge of the water, golden-green in jewel-bright lawns and glades set between the trees, shadow-green under the roof of their massed leafage. Here and there a cloud of white or pink or lilac showed that the canopy was of blossom ; here and there, also, the verdure met with a snowy rim, which might be either sand or flowers or foam. Blue of distant hills, clear and soft as wood-smoke, glimpsed down the farthest vistas of the forest alleys. A fair wind, steady and strong enough, carried him on swiftly, so that he was soon able to choose his landing-place, and he steered for a cluster of tall, carnation-coloured lilies, at the entrance to a creek, wherein a stream ended its shining and singing. As he came near the shore he was struck by the transparent limpidity of the water, and the absence of those weedy wreaths and trails, leathery and slimy, which haunt the meeting-place of wave and beach



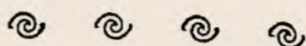
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with harsh and pungent odours. Not a trace of these appeared ; but the breezes came fragrant and aromatic, and as the moteless crystal shallowed, Denis seemed to be floating over a flooded meadow, for the bottom was all mossy sward and starry little blossoms.

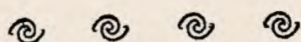
He landed with great ease beside a low bank dappled with the heart-shaped brown leaves of a creeper twining among fragrant cups of dwarfish golden tulips. Up this he hauled his light canoe, as he had no means of mooring her. "How about the tide?" he thought, but looking around saw nothing to betoken ebb and flow. On the other hand a silvery-boled beech, spreading ample boughs, guaranteed him above high-water mark. So he shoved the boat into its shadow, and began to walk about, moved by the curiosity and wish to stretch his legs, which the end of a journey so commonly produces.

Both feelings were soon merged in the admiration and pleasure that grew upon him as he went. There was a charm about his new surroundings which their obvious and evident beauty did not

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fully explain. In the glades and alleys of this woodland, vegetation had all the richness and splendour of the tropics mingled with the delicacy of more temperate climes ; but it nowhere burst into any riotous and oppressive exuberance such as is the bane alike of jungles and thickets. Here were none of the matted masses that weave whole forests into a block more impenetrable than granite, or at best set all but impassable barriers and snares in the traveller's way. Instead of a reckless, indiscriminate rush and struggle, with victory, often unseemly and unsightly, of the rankest and coarsest forms, plant-life manifested itself in a wealth and variety that transcended imagination, yet without bewildering or wearying the senses. Whithersoever Denis turned he saw his path as clear of obstructions as if he were looking through the columns and across the floor of some vast temple ; nevertheless a wilder wilderness could not be. Only it was not its nature to be overgrown and overcrowded. Nothing seemed too much, or even suggested a possibility of becoming so ; and hence an impression of spacious freedom, even

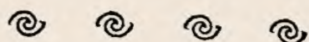


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when standing still. It was heightened, of course, when he actually walked about without wading and stumbling among snaky coils of creepers and shaggy entanglements of grass and weeds, or forcing a painful passage through thorny brakes, where a thousand barbed hooks angled for shreds of himself or his garments. Certainly the fact that he met with nothing spiky, or sticky, or slimy, or swampy much enhanced the comfort of his explorations.

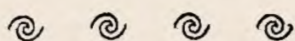
In short, he began to feel, though he may not have been consciously aware of it, that he had arrived in a region where there was, so to speak, no behind-the-scenes, and in this respect differing from any other place he had ever visited. Never before had he spent half an hour wandering observantly without coming upon something distasteful, something to be turned away from more or less disgustedly, when it revealed its presence. At home, if he gathered a long-stalked foxglove from beneath a hedge, he had to beware of contact with some clammy crawling slug. If he sat down on a mossy bank, a red worm was likely

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enough to wriggle out from some crevice, or a bloated beetle, or a scurry of ants, to betray their objectionable neighbourhood. Swarms of black flies possessed many places, like a disintegrated, unclean spirit. A turn in the clearest stream might disclose the ugly spectacle of a rook or a rat long dead. Lumps of frog-spawn defiled crystal pools ; earwigs and nameless grubs lurked under loose stones. Everywhere rotting weeds, sodden and dank, drooped their misfeatured forms, mildewed, malodorous, vile to sight and touch. Denis had become familiar with all these experiences before he left home, and on his travels had found them intensified in places where what had there been merely nasty was apt to prove noxious and deadly as well as loathsome. The most innocent flower with a not improbable snake, scorpion, or centipede under it loses much of its attraction for the suspicious beholder, and suspicious in such circumstances the beholder does well to be.

But now Denis did not ramble long ere he fell to wondering at this woodland's freedom from all these repulsive little nightmares of death in



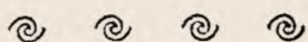
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life. Look where he might everything was fresh and clean ; he did not see so much as a withered flower. This occurred to him as he stood on the bank of the swift river, beside a bush covered with large rose-blossoms, honey-hued and scented, their many petals folded in delicious curves. Suddenly one of them opened widely, letting fall a drop of dew, and before it had flashed into the running water, every petal had disappeared—just a half-glimpse he caught, as of a fluttering away of frail, elfin wings on a waft of air ; but all he actually saw was that a coronal of deep-golden stamens, dusted with pearl, alone remained in their place. And while he looked these, too, vanished tracelessly. He watched the same process repeated several times in the course of his stroll, and said to himself, remembering the sorrowful and unsightly relics he had often beheld in garden and field, that the thing seemed to be better managed in this place. There was one detail in this management, however, which did not come to his knowledge until some time later on.

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As he roamed about he marvelled at the strange quietness that prevailed. The rustling and rippling of leaves and water were the only sounds to be heard. Nothing buzzed or chirped or croaked in the forest, nothing roared or growled; his approach aroused neither fear nor resentment as it had been wont to do. On the shore no sea-bird cried above the rhythmical murmur of the breaking waves. It was a refreshing stillness, and Denis did not, on the whole, regret its cause. Balancing a humming-bird and a tomtit against a tarantula and a bluebottle, he said to himself that the absence of all four was distinctly preferable to their simultaneous presence; and had his calculations involved beasts of prey, the result would have been even more decisive.

Being so fully and interestingly occupied with his explorations, he forgot how many hours he had gone without food, until he chanced upon a vine-like creeper, laden with clusters of transparent fruit, quaintly pouch-shaped, and amber in hue. Its species was unknown to him, but aspect and odour bespoke it eatable, and he

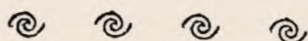


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found that it combined the qualities of strawberry and apricot with something very agreeably original. The supply was abundant, and he ate not a few of them and of some creamy kernelled nuts on his way back to the strand. By this time daylight was ebbing fast, which made him resolve to stay there for the night. On the morrow he would continue his journey by land or sea. So he bathed in a commodious pool, where the pavement was springy turf powdered with tiny, fragrant bell-flowers, and then sought himself a convenient sleeping-place in a swarded recess overhung by beechen-boughs.

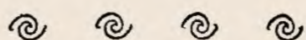
Near it he fancied that he had at last met with some traces of animal life, for in a little hollow he saw lying a drift of what seemed to be shells. They displayed every imaginable faint and delicate tint, and their various whorls and flutings were most finely and perfectly wrought. Closer examination, however, showed him that they were not shells at all but flower-petals, more or less recently scattered and gathered by the breeze. Those that were apparently the

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longest fallen had become stiffer and more brittle in substance than the rest, and many of them had acquired a mother-o'-pearly iridescence. The fresher petals, still soft and flexible, were already curled into the deftest valves and spirals. This thrifty way of using up remnants struck Denis as a happy device, and he diverted himself for some minutes by sorting out different specimens of counterfeited species. Holding on his palm what had the semblance of daintily crimped pinkish cowries and rosy-flushed scallop-shells, he thought them all the more attractive for the lack of any ill-favoured molluscous inhabitant. Some of them crumbled, when touched, into a hardly palpable dust, which retained the sweetness of the blossom, and this, he supposed, was the ultimate end of them all.

Other drifts, strewn by the margin, or in nooks and niches, drew his notice, shimmering through the twilight. He found that they were composed of tiny semi-opaque pebbles ranging in size from hemp to millet-seed. The grains were of very diverse, invariably symmetrical shapes, chiefly pure white, but often just tinged with clear, faint, gem-like

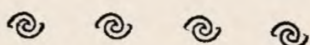


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colours. These again, with their variety of cubes and discs and balls, their streaks and stains of wild-violet and saffron and sea-green and iris-grey, gave him a curiously childish pleasure ; and he fell asleep at last with a hand half full of them.

When, on the morrow, Denis wakened, which he did because he had slept long enough, and not, as more commonly happens, because some fellow-creature was making a noise, he resolved, while taking a swim, to continue his travels on foot. The sparkling blue water, indeed, spread an alluring path, and a cheerful breeze offered that effortless voyaging which always appeals powerfully to the sloth within us. But the multifarious charms of that strange land, with its boundless possibilities, outweighed the simple spell of the sea. Therefore he decided to ascend the river in the direction of those clear blue hills seen down the lovely forest vistas, considering that if his route brought him to no inhabited regions, and if the means of subsistence seemed likely to fail, he could make his way back to the shore, and once more try his fortune by sea. He hauled his

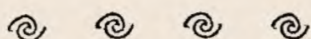
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boat farther up under the lee of a shady bank, there to lie on a bed of the silken-soft, glistening gravel, unobserved, he hoped, by any wayfarer as dishonest as himself.

No sign of human existence was indeed visible far and wide, nor had the morning, to all appearances, risen on any living thing except Denis Maine. He gathered him a breakfast of fruit, supplemented by some dewy mushrooms, which he found flecking a little bright lawn just beyond his beech-tree bower. Of these he put a small store into his knapsack, lest they should not recur. That, and the placing in a handy pocket of his old penknife, wherewith to blaze an occasional trunk, seemed to complete all the preparations which were either expedient or feasible.

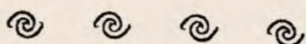
His frame of mind while he made them was rather curious. It was as if some entity of himself had withdrawn into an aloofness quite apart from disquieting emotions such as hope or fear, and thence surveyed his own fortunes, an unperturbed, even if interested, spectator. As part and parcel



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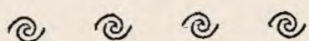
of this mood he regarded the fact that the utter solitude in which he had spent the last four and twenty hours had brought him no wish for intercourse with his kind, were it but a passing stare exchanged with some person of swarthy complexion and unintelligible speech. If that had been all, this indifference would, in his present circumstances, have appeared happy enough ; but he attributed to the same cause another alteration which he deplored. He missed a certain fond and foolish freak of the imagination—he could suppose it nothing better—which had been wont to visit him whenever he arrived among new scenes, especially if they were beautiful and lonesome—a feeling that those whom, rationally speaking, he knew he should see no more, he there might meet with at any turn of the unfamiliar path. The senseless fancy gave him gleams of inexplicable joy, which a reiterated disproof by the inevitable sequel availed nothing to extinguish. Here, however, amid surroundings, and in a magical atmosphere, where they seemed most sure to be kindled, not a glimmer came to him. This

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defection dulled and dimmed things surprisingly, so that even on the threshold now of his untrodden, adventurous day, a cloud of leaden tedium lowered over him. A torpid apathy, benumbing his faculties, stole on him moment by moment, and gradually took away all meaning, all reality, from action, thought, nay, from very existence. It was with a sudden desperation, as if roused to struggle against the poison breathed by some stifling vapour, that he remembered his one sovran charm for dispelling such pestilent influences—his violin, which he had not touched for a day and a night.

That charm did not fail him now. He had played but a very little while, when a sense of loneliness, as poignant and melancholy as he had ever known, came sweeping in upon him from some region beyond that of the crystalline sky and sea and lovely-lighted woodlands, and this only heralded the awakening of an old desire, so impetuous and passionate that it would hear no word of reason, no talk of impossibilities to hinder it from peopling with the maddest hopes all the ways lying before him. And thereupon he was

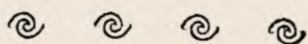


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seized with an eager hurry to set forth. Thus it came to pass that he started on his inland journey, sped by an impulse the true origin of which he could not sanely have admitted. To himself he said that it would not do to waste daylight by delaying.

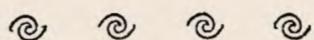
The history of that journey could best be related in a series of moving pictures, for it was mainly a silent shifting of landscape and light and shadow—rivers unwinding their threads, hill-ranges opening their folds, day and night shining from sunbeams to moonbeams. Denis quite lost count of the gold and silver beads, and could not tell how many of them had slipped by. At first he kept along by the bank of the river till it became a leaping mountain-stream, with its source in a high tarn, out of which it sprang in a cataract down the face of a ferny-ledged, rose-granite cliff. There he crossed the mountain-ridge through a pass filled with a grove of cedars and citrons, and in the valley on the farther side took up the clue of another stream. All the way he travelled through a land of inexhaustible pleasantness—cordial sun-

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shine in a most pellucid and delicate air, waters asleep or awake, fair to behold among woods rich as any garden-ground with flowers and fruits, and spacious plains freshly green, girdled by summits soaring under a wing of snow. Everywhere, too, he found the same inherent cleanness of things, which let them bear the closest scrutiny at all stages of their existence. Nothing decayed or grew mouldy or harboured hideous mockeries of life. In short, nothing died, not so much as a blossom. But then, it was true that no more than a blossom did anything live.

Generally Denis was not disposed to regret this latter circumstance. Had he known it to be a condition of the former, he would undoubtedly have desired that it should persist. Sometimes, indeed, more especially in the early morning, before he started on his day's walk, and at sundown, when he established himself for the night, the thought would occur that it might be pleasant to hear the muffled arpeggios of a horse's gallop throbbing across the sward, or to espy the spark-bright eyes of a furtive wren watching him

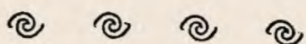


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from among the leafy lattices. Perhaps there were moments when the sight of even a less personable beast or bird would not have been altogether unwelcome ; but these were exceptional. As for the want of human society, he was slow to feel it oppressive, seeing that he had so long since lost all the companionship which counted much. Still, he did instinctively abstain from making music, lest he should revive that overwhelming sense of his solitariness which had cut short his tarrying by the sea. It had soon worn off and ceased to afflict him, amid the cheering distractions of his way, while the dull mood which it had superseded did not return.

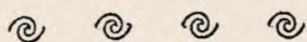
He was living in the immediate present with a thoroughness and simplicity which he had never before approached, and which he would have found it impossible to maintain for so long had his environment been less novel and less delightful. The whole framework, so to speak, of physical existence here became a means of pleasure ; all the necessities of life were things far too exquisite to be called luxuries. Merely to breathe that

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air was to feel an exhilaration, countless reasons for which seemed to suggest themselves as he looked about him. Merely to tread on so gracious a soil would have been in itself enjoyable, even if his steps had not brought him from paradise to paradise with no commonplace tracts between. At this time the grander and statelier beauties of the land had probably less influence on his mood than the fact that at every turn he met with charming trifles, such as the gem-like pebbles and the petal-shells, which had so taken his fancy at the first. Dainty devices of this kind came under his notice particularly often in the course of his foraging for his daily rations, a pursuit which occupied part of his time so agreeably that he half feared he might become in this matter a petty Epicurean, devoted over-much to the quest of new or favourite flavours.

Here and there he paused by the way to build up a small cairn with slabs of a common, glistening white stone. These might serve to guide him on a return journey, of which, however, he thought less and less. Now and then



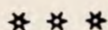
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a cool breath after dusk tempted him to kindle
a fire, such as the Witch of Atlas need not have
despised, for on his sylvan hearth

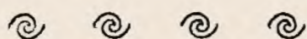
Lay burning many a piece
Of sandalwood, rare gum, and cinnamon.

But a prosaic need of economy in matches withheld him from often amusing himself thus, until he happened on a sort of glorified flint, that flashed into flame at a touch. Furthermore, it was seldom that the day's close did not come together with a drowsiness which deepened into slumber, profoundly satisfying, and filled with most magical dreams.

How long his high content in this solitude might have lasted he could not conjecture. How long it actually did last he had, as we have said, lost the means of reckoning ere ever it ended.



ONE day he came to a tract of country differing in some ways from any he had yet traversed. It was a rather lofty plateau, forming a huge terrace along a range of snowy-peaked mountains. Also it was a forest of giant trees, with trunks erect as columns lifting almost out of sight a foliage roof. This was not very densely wrought, however, for there were wide intervals between the trees as they stood in their vast colonnades, and the over-arching boughs were so lightly interlaced that shadows fretted the wide floor beneath with the finest traceries, while the sunbeams, sometimes strewn in spangles, sometimes came slanted down through high clerestory windows, flooding spaces with sheer gold, or streamed into courts open to the sky. Great starry blossoms of a faint amethyst or dim opal hung about the stems, and the ground below



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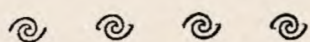
was all spread with the velvet of a tiny deep brown and purple pansy, as springy to tread on as heather, and as odorous as a bed of balsam. A very swift river ran through this forest, keeping close to the foot of the mountain-wall, down which many tributary streams flashed white in headlong haste. Denis, following the other bank, had the rush and murmur on his left hand all the way, and only lost the sound of running water when he quitted it for a while on a detour to the right, which he never made wide enough to reach the limits of the forest.

That day's weather might have beseemed an Elysian April, with capricious gleams and glooms flitting by, and the crystal spray of a shower glancing down ever and anon in sheeny threads from the vaulted emerald canopy to begem the sombre richness of the pansy-pavement. Hour after hour he wandered on with nothing except the tireless speed of the river to rebuke his loitering. Towards evening, when the sunbeams lengthened, they fell farther apart, for the big trees crowded closer together, weaving a duskier

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fabric on their loom of shadows. A cliff rose up on his right hand, too, so that the river and he were shut into a strait passage where the chink of bright green, far up overhead, and the large glimmering blossoms, and scudding foam-wreaths, were the only high lights in its dimness. Then the ground began to fall into a declivity, and soon he rather suddenly found himself on the brow of a westward fronting precipice, over which the river gloriously leaped. Glimpses of what lay beyond, half seen through a leafy curtain, made him eager to follow, so, finding the descent not quite impossibly steep, he clambered down the cliff, and at its base emerged from the precincts of the deep wood.

He stepped into a sunset-lighted valley, which he thought surpassed all the sights of his way-faring through that strange land. Its enfolding hills were so curved and coloured, so radiant its upland lawns and glades, and its shimmering water-meadows, that made a setting for the vineleaf-shaped mere, the valley's captain jewel. Only a few grassy roods sloped between him



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and the nearest of the little bays, and he hurried down to the water's rim. It met the greensward with a quivering silvery lip that stirred the short, fine blades and slender flower-stalks tremulously when a ripple skimmed by. There was no border of reeds and rushes to mark its boundaries in most places, and Denis saw, glowing up through the clearness along its margin, and mingled with the mirrored blue, the same many-hued wealth of blossoms that clothed its shores. Thus he had seen drowned daisies and buttercups entangled among the drifting clouds in flooded meadows at home ; but he was by this time familiar with vegetation that could adapt itself to a water-world. It seemed evident that if these rivers and lakes were drained dry, no unsightly wastes of mud would be revealed.

As Denis had been on foot since daybreak, he was not loth, after a swim and supper, to choose himself a sleeping-place close by the lapping of the lake. It was at the foot of a long, gentle, wooded slope, where a group of magnolia trees swept the mossy ground with darkly

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drooping boughs. From between them he looked south-eastward across one of the lake's many corners, beyond which lay a maze of shadowy woodland, girdled by the still glowing hills. Drifts of fiery clouds sailed over them, where, dim as the wraith of a white rose-leaf, wandered the moon. To watch the flushed vapours fading, while the phantom globe filled slowly with pale brightness, pleased Denis well for a time as he awaited the oncoming of sleep. But presently his attention was caught by something more out of the way than sunset or moonrise. As the dusk gathered, faint, starry gleams began to flock the surface of the mere, and he saw that they came from flower-cups, which had risen up, shining with a light of their own. This by and by grew brilliant enough to throw vivid reflections of their coloured chalices on the water ; and presently its depths near and far became illumined in the like fashion with leaves and blossoms and stems aflame. Thus the nearest reach of the lake disclosed a wondrous pleached alley of burning clematis and woodbine, which

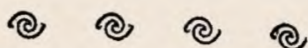
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twined meshes of tendrilled fire across and across, until it ended where a great myrtle kindled a moth-white mist. Denis got up, and went down to the water's edge for a closer view of this curious thing. He plucked a few of the submerged blossoms, some pink sweet-pea and feathery picotees, which seemed to drip a dew of sparks as he touched them, but in his hand were quickly extinguished, and no longer had any perceptible peculiarity. A scarlet poppy dropped its petals, and they floated away over the ripples like fierce embers.

Now there was not apparently anything in this fantastic little illumination to make Denis think of his violin, and long to make it speak once more. Yet that did come to pass, and with fateful consequences.

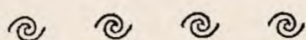
For as he stood staring into the jewelled labyrinths of the water-pleasance, he became aware that a profound melancholy was stealing over him. Vague and causeless-seeming at first, it shaped itself into the thought that the sight was one which, even in his description, would have given

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peculiar delight to a flower-lover whom he had known ; and the impossibility of now treasuring up the memory for her, saddened him with a disproportionate sense of forlornness, as such trifles will. Therefore it was natural enough that he should seek relief in the utterance of that wordless language, which beyond all mortal speech is a cry to the unseeing and unhearing. A craving for the music which he had of late more or less purposely forgone seized him irresistibly, and he hastened once again to open the case of his comrade violin.

Having tuned it with eager and dexterous fingers, he began to play, leaning back against the trunk of an embowering tree, which drooped delicately leafed branches almost into the water. Never had he found music more consoling than the strains he sent floating out over the mere, hushed in the moonlight with those flower-fires at its heart. He began with the air of his mother's, like sleep rounding a dream, and though he strayed from it to other melodies, he often returned to it again. In the very middle

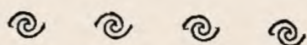


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of the Dream he was when an interruption occurred.

Suddenly, before his astonished eyes, the still brightness of an open glade, just over the little bay, grew all alive and astir. Into it darted several people running at full speed, women certainly, and young, to judge by their swiftness of foot. Even more evidently were they terrified. Fear was manifest in their demeanour as they fled across the open. Midway one of them, tripping, fell, and seemingly lamed herself, whereupon two of her companions dragged her along between them, their gestures betokening protests on her part against delaying them, and on theirs a refusal to leave her in peril. What the nature of this might be appeared to Denis for the moment a more important matter than the discovery, in itself so interesting, that he was once again in an inhabited region, within the borders of civilisation, moreover ; for, saving perhaps their wild panic, these strangers showed no sign of belonging to a primitive race. They might, he thought, have been a group of girls from home,

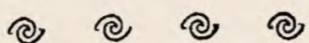
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as far as appearances went. How to assist them was the most urgent question ; it did not occur to him to suppose that he could be at all connected with their alarm. He was standing and considering whether to swim across or run round the shore would be his speediest way, when he heard, quite close at hand, the long unfamiliar sound of footsteps.

Out of the grove on his right a girl came running towards him in great haste ; but she clearly was in pursuit of something, and not fleeing from an object of dread. In a moment she had espied Denis, and paused beside him. "It must have passed here," she said breathlessly ; "can you tell me which way it went ?"

Denis could only repeat "Which way it went ?" with what he felt must be an exasperating futility ; and she replied to it impatiently : "The music—the music—which way did it go ? You must surely have heard it. I think you must have seen the Mist"—her voice dropped as if she were uttering some too sacred word—"though we could not. But it was very near."



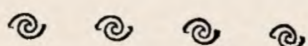
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Her dark eyes, which were most beautiful, implored an answer so earnestly that he fervently wished he could have given her one more to the purpose than was in his power. "Indeed I heard nothing," he said, "except my own fiddling, and if that has annoyed or alarmed you in the least, I can only say that I regret it extremely."

At the first sentence she had turned away from him with an air of profound disappointment, and stood gazing over the lake, listening intently, her graceful black head poised as if she were a bird ready for flight at the signal of some expected sound. Denis, puzzled and somewhat at a loss, thought that he might possibly best explain himself by his violin, and he began to play a few bars upon it very softly. But the effect of this was wholly unlooked for. The girl turned again, and threw herself at his feet. "Take me with you," she cried. "Oh, take me away with you wherever you are going! Bring me to them, wherever they may be!"

She hid her face in her hands, and seemed

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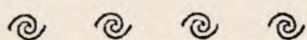


once more to await a summons desired yet dreaded. Looking down perplexedly on her bowed head, Denis could but suppose her to be sadly distraught, and on this assumption he knew not what he should say or do. His doubts, however, were soon abridged, for, following on her track in high haste, came two young men, the first of whom, going up to the girl, stooped over her, and drew her aside, while the other advanced towards Denis with an expression of stern inquiry on a remarkably handsome visage. Denis went to meet him, saying : “ I’m afraid that my music has somehow distressed this lady.”

“ *Your* music ! ” the other replied ; and he, too, spoke with an inflection of awe in his tone. “ What do you mean ? ”

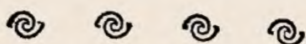
“ Why, just that I was fiddling a bit,” Denis said. Then, bethinking him that the instrument might have some peculiar name in these remote regions, he held out his violin, adding explanatorily : “ on this, you see.”

To his surprise, however, the young man



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behaved very much as he might have done had a venomous serpent been abruptly thrust forward for inspection. Though he controlled, obviously with an effort, his impulse to recoil from it, he eyed it with an expression of mingled mistrust and abhorrence. It seemed to Denis strange indeed that any such feelings should be aroused by the sight of his cherished Strad, with the noble lines and mellow amber tint, a treasured possession, for which he had thankfully paid nearly a whole year's income. With a disposition to resent so disparaging a reception of it, and to vindicate its merits, he raised it chin high, and again began to play softly. But again the performance had an unaccountable effect upon his hearers. The girl, to whom one of the men had been speaking in an undertone, broke away from him with a cry, but was intercepted by the other as she ran towards the musician. Both men exclaimed indignantly, and one of them, coming up to Denis, who had ceased playing, but still shouldered his violin, said: "This is a most extraordinary proceeding."

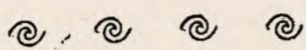


Denis stared at him uncomprehending. The first conjecture that occurred to him was that he had possibly strayed into the demesne of some exalted personage, from whose precincts all outsiders were rigorously excluded, and where an uncommanded violin solo might be a serious offence. "If I am trespassing, I must apologise," he said. "It was quite inadvertently."

"You must be aware that it is not *trespassing* we complain of," the other said, and looked significantly at the violin.

"Am I to understand that music is forbidden here?" said Denis. "If so, I regret that I took out my instrument, and I will put it up at once, which is all I can do. I'm extremely sorry that it has caused so much annoyance." To himself he added: "Out of practice I certainly am; still, I can't believe that there was anything so intolerable about my playing."

He was moving towards his violin-case, which lay under the tree, when the stranger interposed, saying gravely: "You can't think that the matter will end here."



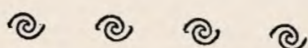
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“Does that mean a summons for trespass, or whatever its equivalent may be with you?” said Denis, still reasoning from old-world analogies. Yet even as he spoke he surmised a mystery in the face of which they did not hold good. For in the looks and manner of these persons he perceived something solemn, awe-stricken, not to be explained by any mere accidental intrusion within what were certainly no clearly defined bounds. An act of startling sacrilege would have been more congruous grounds for their demeanour. “I’m a complete stranger,” he added, with a view to clearing up the situation.

The other, who had been looking hard at him, now inquired with equal directness: “Where do you come from?”

“Well, the last place I knew the name of was Sermachaon, a very small village near the coast of Cambodia,” said Denis. These names were received with a shake of the head, and he continued: “But since then I’ve taken a sea-voyage, and have travelled for days up this country from the shore without seeing a sign of man or beast,

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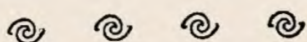
so I feel rather vague as to my whereabouts at present."

This statement made a strong sensation. "Do you mean to say that you came across the sea?" the young man exclaimed. "Destran, look here," he said, beckoning to his companion, who stepped forward eagerly.

"I did, indeed," said Denis, "in the queerest little craft imaginable. I had no intention beforehand of taking anything like so long a voyage; but the fact is that I lost my bearings entirely after I had passed through that extraordinary cliff-wall in the mist, if mist it is——"

He was interrupted by amazed ejaculations from both his hearers. "The cliff-wall in the mist—through the cliff-wall!" They might have been receiving news from another planet. The girl was standing a little way off in the shadow, and across a belt of moonlight Denis saw her eyes shine like listening stars.

"We must inquire into this at once, Lynmarch," said Destran; and they forthwith began to put a series of questions about his voyage, which Denis



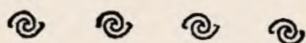
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answered, nothing loth. He regarded them as a preliminary to obtaining for himself some information which, in the circumstances, would be useful and interesting.

Soon, however, his catechists broke off, and Lynmarch said : “ I think we had better adjourn this inquiry until to-morrow, as it is so late. Would you object to coming home with us ? Otherwise we must appeal to the authorities, for it is impossible just now to leave you at large.”

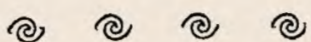
The last clause sounded far from agreeable to Denis, seeing that his wish and his wont had always been to be very much at large indeed. But to insist upon this seemed, in the present circumstances, probably impracticable, and certainly unwise. His friendless and resourceless plight, the fact that he had unawares committed some grave offence against the laws of this strange land, respecting which his ignorance was so unbounded, and that he might therefore find himself at a serious disadvantage in his future progress through it—these considerations counselled him to fall in

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with his new acquaintances' views. Nor were more positive inducements wanting. There was something about his would-be hosts that inspired confidence, both ethically and intellectually, notwithstanding those singular aberrations on the subject of music. He felt sure that from them he would obtain an intelligent account of many new and strange things, to which he looked forward with a keen curiosity, whetted by the events of the last hour. Hitherto he had been content to look about him with unspeculative pleasure ; but now with the opportunity of making inquiries, a vast number of questions seemed to him to await an answer. Moreover, since this meeting with his kind he had grown vividly conscious of the utter solitude in which he had been abiding so long ; and his feeling was that straightway to immerse himself in it again would require an effort.

Perhaps he felt this all the more strongly when, upon Lynmarch's calling "Elmède," he saw the girl step out of the shadow and draw nearer, a slender, white-robed figure moving across the

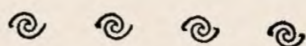


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moonlight. Perhaps, too, among the questions that interested him most was one touching the sadness in her eyes. She seemed now quite composed, and he was relieved no longer to see any reason for thinking that her former excitement had sprung merely from some melancholy hallucination. But he did imagine, and not with reluctance, that there was a sort of wistfulness in her face as she listened for his reply to the invitation. This might betoken, he thought, that her passion for music had not died quite away, as he would have been loth that it should do. He had already hastily built up a theory, which in part accounted for the effect of his playing upon her and her companions. His conjecture was the existence here of some extreme form of ascetic Puritanism, which had resulted on the one hand in the rigorous prohibition of such sensuous delights as music, and on the other in wild outbreaks of the suppressed craving for them, whenever chance brought them within reach.

Prudence, thus, and to some extent inclination, dissuaded him from refusing the offered hospitality,

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even though it might be for the present time but captivity in polite parlance.

"I should have no hesitation about going with you," he said frankly, "only that I seem somehow to have become an offender against your laws, which may make my presence inconvenient and disagreeable to you all."

"No fear of that," Lynmarch replied. "Let us consider the matter settled. Destran, if you will drive my sister home, we will follow you."

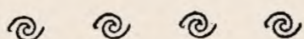
His sister, however, spoke for herself. "Couldn't we all go together in the large car?" she said.

"No, no, Elmède. Lynmarch, we couldn't risk that?" Destran objected, glancing at the violin, which was still in Denis's hand.

"If this is a difficulty, I would leave it here," Denis said, not without a secret pang, "and fetch it in the morning."

"Strictly speaking, of course we ought to destroy it on the spot," said Destran.

"But that would be folly," Elmède declared,



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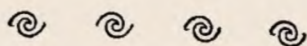
forestalling Denis's vehement protest ; and Lynmarch said : " We must stretch several points on this occasion, and do nothing in a hurry. If you will shut up that instrument in its case," he said to Denis, " I am sure that we may trust you not to use it again without permission. We had much better take it with us, and start at once."

To this everybody assented. As they walked round the curve of the lake, where the glowing alleys shifted and opened ever more faerylike vistas, Denis said : " Was it I, then, who disturbed the people that I saw running off through the trees over there not along ago ? "

" It must have been," said Lynmarch. " Probably they had come here, like ourselves, to see the fire in blossom. It's one of our sights, being very rare in this part of the country."

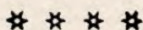
Despite a conscience which acquitted him of any evil intent, Denis felt somewhat guilty as he looked round on the scene wherein he had waked such strange terrors—the dreamy, silver lawns in their framing of forest shadows, the

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soft, blue tracery of the hills, the lake's rippling of fire-veined crystal—and he walked on silently until they came to a glade where two small vehicles were standing. These appeared to be built lightly of unpainted wood, but they evidently contained some invisible apparatus, powerful and compact, for they scudded along at a speed he had never before experienced. Smoothly and noiselessly they went across country, clearing obstacles with such deftness that the change of level was scarcely perceptible save to the eye.

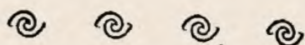
This rapid motion, and the dimness caused by a soft veiling of the moon, left Denis only vague impressions of the journey, which was not a long one. Soon they came to a low house among lawns and trees and shining waters, a roof resting on pillars, a wide, cool hall, full of clear light, whence his host ushered him into a chamber spacious and simple, white and pale green and cedar-brown in colouring, the very aspect of which invited repose.



NEXT morning Denis awoke with mingled feelings to a recollection that he had rejoined the human race. The circumstances in which he had done so seemed to him partly pleasant and partly the reverse, amongst the latter being the fact that he must consider himself in a sort of honourable captivity. It is true that large windows, opening on the woods, seemed to offer the means of terminating this at any moment. He might possibly be under some surveillance, but there was apparently nothing to hinder him from walking off, violin and all. However, he had on the whole no inclination to take such a step, even if he did not feel himself bound to remain where he was.

As he lay thinking over the situation, there came a knock at his door, and Lynmarch's voice inviting him to come to breakfast as soon as he was

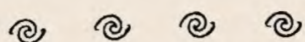
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ready. "You'll find us," it said, "in the left-hand verandah."

Denis made his way thither without delay. Lynmarch was sitting at a little table set in the shade of the eaves on the edge of a lawn, which sloped down to water flashing by between trees. He was reading a small-sized newspaper, which he laid down at sight of Denis, saying with unaffected pleasure: "That's right; you will be far better company. I was hoping that you would appear soon, so as to give us time for some conversation before Destran goes off to his work. But we don't intend to trouble you with questions just at present, as we think it will be better to defer them for a while, until you have seen a little more of ourselves and our ways. Otherwise we should be likely to talk at cross purposes, which lead to all manner of misunderstandings. What is your opinion?"

With this view Denis was quite ready to agree. Later on he became aware of other reasons for the postponement. He trusted that he might get through the interval without again stumbling into any

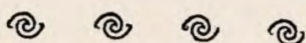


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serious misdemeanour, and he said something of this to Lynmarch, who at mention of the subject looked grave, but showed less discomposure than on the evening before. "That, of course, is chief among the many things we must talk over," he said. "I may tell you that personally I don't look on the matter quite with the eye of the law in all cases. It was principally on my sister's account that I so much regretted last night's incident."

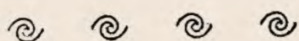
The words at once suggested to Denis a possible explanation of the mysterious horror which he had unwittingly aroused. He remembered how a great naturalist had discovered that certain South American tribes possessed sacred musical instruments, the mere sight of which, even by chance, entailed, according to their law, fatal consequences upon any woman. Some variety of this curious custom might exist here, he thought, inappropriate as such a superstition seemed to a people otherwise apparently so civilised in their ideas. Still, upon a little further reflection he had to admit the existence among his own folk, in

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their most highly cultured state, of observances which to an unprejudiced stranger might well appear fully as senseless, albeit not so tragical ; and with a thrill of dismay he expressed a hope that she had not suffered any ill effects.

Lynmarch's reply was reassuring. His sister, he said, had gone out sketching with Destran's mother, an old friend of theirs who was visiting them. At this moment Destran arrived, carrying two ample pitchers, one of wine, one of chocolate, which he had been making indoors ; and they began their breakfast. In the middle of the table, on a long-shaped green leaf, lay what looked like a giant wheat-ear. On a nearer view, however, Denis saw that each grain was a delicate little roll of bread. These rolls were made of very fine meal, and baked to the colour of ripe corn ; they tasted of the sunshine. The three men breakfasted on these and clusters of great purple grapes, piled darkly in a white wicker basket. For plates they used large, round, saucer-like leaves, and they drank out of very thin pale-green bowls, finely enmeshed outside with what seemed to be tracerics

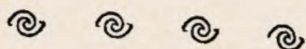


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of frosted silver, pearly white within. It was some time before Denis recognised them as the outer rind of a small melon, which ran wild all over the woods.

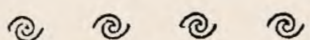
It was a rather silent meal. Denis felt as he had sometimes done in the ante-room of a picture gallery, when looking over the catalogue, and marking the pictures with which he meant to begin. Of course he knew that here the choice did not by any means wholly rest with him ; but he saw the expediency of making plans beforehand, though subject, it might be, to his companions' approval. They were occupied in much the same way, he had reasons to believe, for they could not quite conceal the curiosity with which they regarded him ; and he perceived that he was thus to some extent master of the situation, since his statements would seemingly be their sole source of intelligence, whilst he could observe as well as inquire. To set against this advantage was the weakness of his position as "a single thing," and one, moreover, whose movements undoubtedly might be placed under restraint. He could not tell how

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far his present entertainers might see fit, or would have the power, to restrict his opportunities of making notes ; and he resolved that the ascertainment of this point should, if possible, take precedence of any other question.

Naturally enough, therefore, he commented upon his hosts to himself with considerable interest as he ate his rolls and drank his wine, finding both excellent. Lynmarch and Destran were tall, good-looking men, of somewhat the same type, though not like one another—so ran his observations—and apparently about his own age. Square foreheads, and long, fine hands especially struck him as incongruous with their vehement abhorrence of music, and so did their voices, which were singularly pleasant in tone. Their clothes did not greatly differ from those worn by rational Europeans in genial climes, being loose and light-coloured, but simpler and shapelier, and softer in texture. He was, in short, very favourably impressed, and though he had not much vanity, he could not forbear to regret the tramp-like aspect caused by



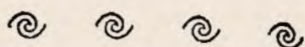
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unclipped hair and wayworn garments, which his reflection in a large mirror had lately shown him.

When they had finished breakfast, Lynmarch opened a small door in one of the pillars, disclosing a fire-place, and turned on a jet of flame, into which were thrown all the things they had used at the meal. This summary method of washing-up commended itself strongly to Denis, and seemed satisfactorily to account for the absence of servants, a feature which he also viewed with approbation.

Then Destran said that it was time for him to set off, and the other two accompanied him to a bridge over the river, down which he started, skimming along in a water-car. As Lynmarch sauntered back with Denis up the slope towards the house, he explained that Destran had gone to superintend some electrical experiments, which were in progress at a laboratory farther down the river. He might be detained there for the rest of the day, or he might return within an hour, and Lynmarch proposed that they should

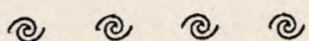
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wait and see whether he did so before they made their own plans.

"We have resolved," he added, "that we will keep to ourselves the circumstances in which we met with you last night, until you have had an opportunity of giving an account of yourself. That will, of course, help to determine what step we may feel called upon to take. It's possible, indeed, that the music may be traced to you, but it doesn't seem likely, as the other hearers, we find, were a party of young girls, who had come from a great distance, and who fled away without seeing any of us. They may never know that it was not what they supposed it to be." Again his tone took the gravity tinged with awe, which puzzled Denis whenever the subject of music was touched upon. But, turning away from it now, he continued: "Perhaps you will like to stroll about a bit while we're waiting; the shower last night has made the air very fresh and pleasant. And I'd like to see what you think of two or three pictures indoors."

Denis thought that it had never been his lot



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to wait among surroundings more to his taste. The house, which was a long, one-storeyed building, stood on a slope slightly raised above the curve of a swift-flowing stream, in what he might almost have taken for a park at home, had not the green-sward been jewelled with strange-blossomed shrubs and flowers, and the groups of towering trees interspersed with palms plumed and feathery-fronded. He saw no formal gardens, but Lynmarch told him that they lay behind a belt of limes, and pointed out the way through a pergola laden with a drift of white jasmin stars. Marble and wood, chiefly soft grey and brown in colouring, were the materials of the building.

The rooms, large and small, all had an air of repose, due partly to their harmonious proportions, partly to the absence of littering knickknacks, and the purposeful simplicity of the objects they did contain. Save a few exquisite pictures there were scarcely any ornaments. Books lay about everywhere, and lined the walls of one long room—volumes small in size, and pleasing both to see and handle. Here Lynmarch explained that he

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was engaged on a work about some scientific researches in which he had collaborated with his friend Destran's father, who had died two or three years ago. At that time the elder Destran had just made a discovery, which promised to be of very considerable importance, and Lynmarch had now so nearly finished working it out that he hoped to publish an account of it in a few months.

To Denis it seemed that only one desirable thing was lacking : nowhere did he see a trace of any occupation connected with music. He thought wistfully of his violin, wondering when he would be able again to open its case ; but he felt bound to avoid the subject. In fact, the postponement of the very topics which were uppermost in the minds of each placed their conversation under some restraint, so that they talked principally about the trivialities coming before them as they sauntered through the house. When they had been all round and about it, Denis recollected that he had seen no kitchen, unless one might so call the charming sandalwood-

panelled room to which they came last, and where Lynmarch pointed out, standing in a corner, a low, marble pillar topped with steel. This, he said, could be made even red-hot almost instantaneously, and as expeditiously reduced to a temperature many hundred degrees below zero by means of liquid air. It was a new apparatus, and its quickness would be convenient if you wanted to boil or freeze water in a great hurry ; but at present it required some slight readjustment.

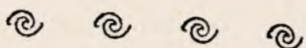
“And no doubt you find that rather troublesome,” observed Denis, “living so far as you seem to do from any large town.”

Lynmarch looked amazed. “Is it possible,” he said, “that you still have *towns*—large towns ?”

“Of course we have,” said Denis, “in great numbers, and large—well, as large as they make them.” But he felt as if he were admitting some discreditable fact, for Lynmarch had put his question in a tone which would not have seemed inappropriate had its subject been cave-dwellings.

Perhaps he was conscious of this, or feared

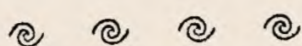
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that they were bordering on forbidden ground ; at any rate, he turned away from it, and as they presently passed the door of Denis's room, exclaimed at his own stupidity for having forgotten to leave a supply of fresh suits there.

" But why didn't you tell us ? " he said. " You must want them after such a long spell of travelling."

He hurried off before Denis could explain that guests, according to his experience, were not clothed as well as boarded and lodged by their entertainers, and returned with an armful of garments, which he brought into Denis's room. " They sent over a large supply the other day, and I dare say you'll be able to sort out some things that will fit you at a pinch," he said. The arrangement seemed so clearly to be regarded so entirely as a matter of course that Denis could not demur. He found acquiescence very convenient, his changes of raiment having become scanty and outworn. An ingenious comb, which, at the smallest cost of time and skill, curtailed the comber's locks to any shortness desired, was

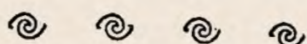


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also supplied by Lynmarch, and with it Denis "calmed his wild hair," much to his own comfort.

Lynmarch then proposed that they should walk into the woods, where they might meet with his sister and her friend on their way home. Destran had sent word that he could not return till evening. It was near noontide when they started, and the sun shone strongly enough to make the shadowy paths welcome. At the base of a great trunk, which stood first in a colonnade of tall plane-trees, Lynmarch stopped, and, pointing upward, said : " My sister often comes by the high way ; it will be our best chance of falling in with them." This huge, silver-grey bole was coiled round spirally with what Denis at first sight had supposed to be merely enwreathing creepers ; but he now saw that the stems and tendrils were artificially twisted into a winding stair of quite easy access. Mounting this, they reached a path of the same interwoven fabric, that stretched from branch to branch and from tree to tree, running on through a bower of greenery, hidden both from above and beneath. A little lopping of boughs had

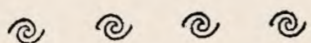
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made the passage clear, and every now and then some natural opening between them gave a glimpse over the country round about—a labyrinth of woods and streams.

About half an hour's walk along this path, which continued, Lynmarch said, several miles farther through the forest, brought them to a vast tower of a tree, its many storeys of ledged branches all hung round with drooping, cup-shaped blossoms, as a Burmese pagoda with bells. Hence there was a view down into a very delightful valley, niched between two hill-ranges, with its meads and groves strung on a shining thread ; and hence another spiral stair descended. Here Lynmarch stopped. "We have missed them," he said, "for they would not have gone farther, I know."

A platform, wider than the path, fronted the view, and on this they stood aloft surveying the sunny green flecked with flowers and shadows. At a little distance a game was going on beside the river, a few players in white tossing about the immemorial ball. From the edge of the high wood two women and two men were walking



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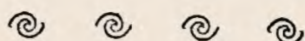
together across a lawn in the direction of the river. "Those are our nearest neighbours on this side," Lynmarch said, "the Verelances, with their son and daughter."

"Strange," Denis thought to himself. "I should have said they were all quite young people."

He stood for a minute or two and watched the group pass along, thwarting the shadow with gay light colours, dazzling into white where the sunshine caught them. They appeared to be laughing and talking merrily, but were less and less within earshot. Indeed a faint rustling of leaves was the only sound astir amid the stillness.

Suddenly into this silence swept a strain of such music as he had never heard even in his dreams. How and whence it rose could not be imagined, for earth and air were all at once filled and flooded with it as with light. Nay, it seemed to thrill through elements lying beneath and beyond them. Turning to his companion in amazement, Denis was further astonished by the expression he saw on Lynmarch's face. It was one of such awe-stricken eagerness and rapt ex-

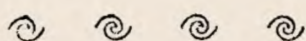
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pectancy, that Denis forbore to interrupt him by a word. But a moment later Lynmarch himself said, under his breath, "It is *not* for her—no, it is for one of them."

He pointed to the lawn below, and Denis became aware that a strange dimness was growing on its brightness. Something vague and impalpable as a thickening of the air gathered about the little group on it, and hid them from sight. This dimness gradually deepened into a hueless, veiling mist, at the same time shrinking and drawing in towards a centre. Then for a moment—though life seemed to have taken an intensity that could not be measured by time—it glowed into the magical sea-blue of the east before sunrise, appeared to fold itself upon itself like a cloak, and was gone. Therewith the music, which had swelled and deepened into a supreamer loveliness, instantly ceased. It was as if a door between two worlds had opened and shut.

At first sight this world seemed to be left unchanged. Back into view flashed the sunlit lawn with the figures upon it. But they now



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numbered only three, who were clinging desperately to each other. Of the two men one was no more to be heard than the silent music, to be seen than the vanished mist.

"It is their son who has gone," said Lynmarch ; "perhaps the greatest loss that could have befallen them ; yet it is hard to say."

Denis gazed and gazed, bewildered. He could hardly believe his eyes, and the enchantment of the music was still upon him. "What has happened ?" he said.

"Had you never seen this until now ?" said Lynmarch.

"Never indeed," said Denis.

"That may well be, of course," said Lynmarch. "But surely you needn't ask what has happened ? You must know the manner of our passing away."

"I know of nothing at all like this," Denis said, still half dreamily. "What was that music ? I've heard some of the grandest that ever was made, but none that could be compared with it."

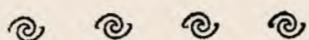
"I know no more about its origin than you do," said Lynmarch, "I had been hoping, less."

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“And you say—and I see—that this man has gone : can’t you tell how or where ?” said Denis. “You spoke as if the thing were not new to you.”

“You can’t be more ignorant than I,” said Lynmarch.

They fell silent for a while. Denis stood looking out over the airy valley with its beams and breath of summer life, whence he had beheld so mysterious a departure. He was, of course, familiar enough with the notion of sudden death, in so far as it implied the abrupt withdrawal of whatever forces were needed to constitute a living creature. Their working might stop dead in the twinkling of an eye, and bring all that marvellous machinery to a standstill, but not annihilate it. There would lie the machine, capable, it might appear, of being started again ; seldom was it possible to decide that point without some delay. To describe such an occurrence as a departure, or even, more vaguely, a passing away, was to speak in defiance of all the outward and visible signs attending it. Here, on the contrary, to



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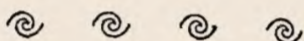
speak so was literally to describe what had actually taken place before their eyes. Here had been no eclipsing or quenching of the life-spark, no senseless form dropped down at their feet, leaving them to doubt whether it would move once more, and behold the sun, or had become a very clod that must soon grow

A heap
To make men tremble, who cannot weep.

What had happened now was, to all appearances, just this man's departure with an untraceable swiftness that so foiled their out-stripped senses that nobody could say witherward he had gone—not those who had stood nearest to him ; for Denis saw one of the two women turning this way and that with wild gestures of beckoning and entreaty, while the others tried to lead her on. The players had left their game, and were hurrying off dispersedly in evident dismay.

Nevertheless Denis's feeling at first was that he had witnessed not so much any tragic ending as an entrance on new paths, over the threshold

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of which had been wafted breathings from supernal regions, as real as mysterious. That veiling, glowing mist, in the very swiftness of its motions, come and gone nowhence and nowhither, was instinct with life. It had folded itself out of sight in a dawning glamour that seemed to shine on his destiny whom it had rapt away. And then the music—Denis would have followed that, he said to himself, into the wildest deeps of the Unknown and Unthought. Only the memory of it held him spell-bound, passively gazing as one in a trance.

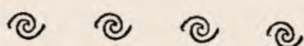
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DENIS was roused by Lynmarch's voice saying: "It is as well, perhaps, that you should have seen a passing so soon, as it may help to make us more intelligible to each other later on. Still I almost think I must have misunderstood you to say that you know nothing of the matter, even by report, for that would make it difficult to imagine under what conditions you have been living."

"You understood me rightly enough," said Denis; "but to the best of my belief, I couldn't at the present moment tell you any more facts that would increase the possibility of your imagining. I'm at a loss where to begin, until I have thought it all over for a while."

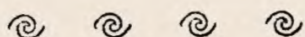
"I entirely agree with you," said Lynmarch, "about its being far better that you should not attempt to give us any information of this kind

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until you have spent some time among us here. It is most desirable that there should be no avoidable sources of perplexity, when you are making and we are receiving such important communications. So for a few days, at least, we will give you what opportunities we can for observing and inquiring, but we shall not expect any account from you. And meanwhile, as there is nothing we can do for these people just now, except leave them alone, let us come down, and take a short cut home through the woods. I'd like to get back before my sister hears of this ; and on the way I'll give you another instance of it, because the event bears directly upon what happened when we met you last night."

As they walked on under the great trees, Lynmarch kept his promise. "Not many months ago," he said, "my sister and I had both our parents living with us here. One evening towards sunset we were all together in the pleasance by the river, when in a moment the music came round us, as you heard it yonder. Elmède and I had been filling a basket with peach-apples,



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and were carrying it down the slope to where the others were sitting on the river's brink. We let it drop, and the apples were still rolling over the grass, when the mist had gathered and deepened and brightened and vanished, and my father was gone. That night, at midnight, my sister was with my mother, when suddenly the music filled all the house. As I ran to their room, I saw the morning-blue of the mist glow through the half-open door; and I found my sister alone. She is devoted to her father and mother, and I know that ever since we lost them her wish has been to pass away herself. So you see how she came to be so profoundly agitated by what she heard, and thought she heard. I fear, indeed, that she is constantly listening and watching. And you will also understand our reasons for regretting that she should have had such an experience."

"My violin and I have certainly been much to blame," Denis said, quite sincerely expressing a sense of guilt. Yet at the same time he could not forget what his playing had drawn to him,

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speeding through the moonlight and shadow ; else, it might be, never to have crossed his path. And the recollection, though it left his penitence undiminished, did mitigate his regret.

“What you have told me,” he said, after a pause, “helps me to guess at the significance of this music ; but my conjectures are still grossly ignorant. I am wondering, for instance, whether it is ever heard except when some one passes away.”

“Never,” said Lynmarch.

“But always then ?”

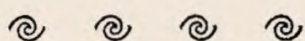
“Always.”

“And always as beautiful as what we heard just now ?”

“So I believe,” said Lynmarch ; “but I needn’t tell you that we associate it with terror rather than beauty.”

“Naturally,” said Denis. “Though it seems to me that anyone might well wish himself such an end as we saw to-day. Are many of you so fortunate ?”

“All, surely, when their time comes, sooner or later,” said Lynmarch.



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"Ah, but often, no doubt, after a long spell of suffering or helplessness," said Denis.

Lynmarch looked puzzled. "I suppose," he said, "you refer to the impossibility of bringing about the end, when it is desired. But that is very far from being often the case."

"I meant the disease and decrepitude and infirmities of all sorts, which few people can hope to escape in the ordinary course of their lives," said Denis.

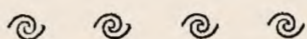
"You seem to take a singularly morbid view of things," Lynmarch said, after a perplexed pause. "Unaccountably so, unless, as is likely enough, you have had what we should consider entirely exceptional experiences. However, these we must postpone. Here's the house again, you see ; this is the covered walk into the honey-garden—and look at that ; some visitors evidently have come."

He pointed to a carriage, which was standing on the grass near the entrance to the garden ; and then he glanced rather uneasily from his guest to the house.

“And what shall I do?” Denis said, perceiving this.

“Well, as it seems advisable that for the present you shouldn’t meet anybody except ourselves,” Lynmarch said, “perhaps you wouldn’t mind waiting in the garden there while I go indoors and reconnoitre. You could easily dodge anybody among all the little paths.”

At the other end of the starry jasmin tunnel Denis emerged into a square open space, bounded by very tall, thick clipped hedges, and intersected by a network of fine moss-paths, bordered with tiny dwarf bushes of the same dark green as the hedge-walls. These cut it up into many nooks and niches and recesses, each so filled with the brilliance and perfume of blossoms that the whole place looked like some great precious stone with countless various-coloured facets, and had for atmosphere a waft of warm fragrance that might have come from the heart of one titanic flower. There was furthermore a quaint antiqueness about its aspect that pleased him much; and he thought that its charm gained a finishing touch, when in



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one of its green-panelled corners he came upon a very little girl. She seemed to be five or six years old, was bare-headed and bare-footed, and wore a pale golden-brown frock. Her short thick hair was golden-brown too, but of a deeper shade, and her large, dark russet eyes shone rather solemnly in a small round face tinted like an apple blossom. Something in the dainty plumpness of this little figure made him think of a wren ; but her occupation suggested a different comparison, for she was going from flower to flower, and squeezing into a gourd-bowl some drops of honey from each. In this corner a trumpet-shaped scarlet salvia drooped its velvety clusters ember-bright among dim grey foliage. Honey abounded in them, for at the pressure of the child's fingers, the mouth of the elfin sac gaped open, and a glancing streamlet trickled out.

An encounter with such a very youthful person could hardly be dangerous, Denis thought, even considering the cloud that hung over him ; so he did not retreat ; and she did not appear to be at all disturbed by his presence. Having watched

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her silently for a while, he began a conversation. "I see you're not afraid to rob the bees," he said, forgetting at the moment that a bee she had probably never beheld.

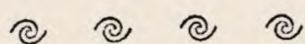
And : "What are bees, strange man ?" she replied, sure enough.

"Oh, they are things that fly about in the air, and sometimes prick people," he said, recollecting himself.

"They don't fly about here," said the little girl, "and I'm afraid of scarcely anything. A great, very great long while ago I used to be afraid of the thunder, and a little of the wind going through the tops of the trees, but I am not now."

"And what *are* you afraid of ?" Denis asked idly.

She looked earnestly at him for a moment, and then going up close to him, said in a low, quick whisper : "Of what comes and calls and cries, and takes people away." The mere mentioning of this fear made it so present to her that she caught hold of Denis's hand, and glanced around her apprehensively.



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"Did you ever hear it?" he asked.

"Oh no, no," she said, with a start that nearly spilt her honey-bowl, and gave another scared look round.

"Did anyone tell you about it?" he inquired, urged on by curiosity in despite of a misgiving that he ought not to pursue a subject which caused her such alarm.

The child shook her head, saying: "Nobody."

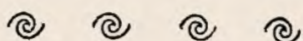
"Then how do you know that there is any such thing at all?" said Denis, in reply to which she dropped his hand, saying coldly: "That isn't a real question."

Denis felt rebuked, and when she continued: "Haven't you heard it yourself, strange man?" he did not attempt to deny or prevaricate. "I think I have," he said, "calling, but not crying."

His frankness seemed to re-establish her shaken confidence, and she approached him again to ask in a very low tone: "Where does it take them away to?"

"That I really can't tell you," said Denis; "but I suppose to some very nice place."

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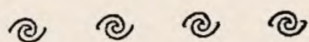


"*This* is a very nice place," she said wistfully, "and at home is a most nice place. I don't want to be took away to anywhere else."

"Well," said Denis reassuringly, "I shouldn't think anybody would take away a little girl like you. What would anybody do with you? You're not big enough to be any use."

She considered the statement for a while before she answered: "But I do some useful things. I learn my letters, and I water the pansies; and I often gather honey, which is very useful indeed." Again she seemed to reflect in silence, and then, as if inspired by a sudden thought, inverted the little bowl, and spilled all its contents in a pool on the mossy grass. "There now," she said in a relieved tone, "that's no use at all. And I won't ever do anything useful any more; mischiefs I'll do instead."

Denis looked at her with a sort of dismay as she stood triumphantly watching the last drops of honey descend in a broken chain of bright beads from the bowl's rim. The result of his speculations could not be commended from an



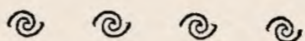
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ethical point of view. "Here's what comes of well-meant deceptions," he moralised to himself. "If I'm not more careful, I'll incur a charge of corrupting youth, and with some justice."

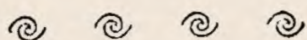
On the present occasion, however, his opportunities for doing so were immediately ended by the arrival of Lynmarch in quest of the child, who, it appeared, belonged to the visitors, and was now to return home. Rather anxiously Denis waited to hear what account she would give of the disaster to the honey. But she simply stated that she had poured it all out on purpose, for mischief, an explanation which Lynmarch seemed to regard as quite satisfactory, and he carried her off, presently returning to fetch Denis.

Indoors they found only Destran's mother, whose blonde beauty, fresh and youthful, certainly took Denis somewhat by surprise, though the impression was blurred for him by the distracting absence of Lynmarch's sister. He had awakened that morning to speculations about the likelihood of meeting her once more, and they had occupied him at intervals ever since. They included grave

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doubts as to whether she might not regard him as some detestable sort of sacrilegious impostor, and refuse to see him again. These seemed now to be strengthened by her non-appearance, a gloomy inference, the drawing of which dulled his appreciation of Avril Destran's charming looks and vivacious talk. But before long he saw Elmède Lynmarch coming through the leaf-enmeshed light and shadow of the verandah, and she brought with her all that was essential in his last night's vision among the moonbeams. There was the graceful head wound with poppy-black silk-soft coils, the clear pale face, the great dark eyes, a presence that made him think of those most delicate white blossoms, to whose loveliness subtle sable touches give emphasis and distinction. Though she spoke little, and seemed disposed to shrink into the background, that was, he said to himself, only a natural effect of her adventure, and relief from his worst apprehensions went far to console him for her silence, especially as she sat close by, and listened intently while he talked with the other two.

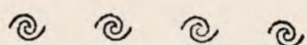


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It is true that this did in a certain degree make conversation more difficult for him, increasing his dread of blundering into some statement that would shock his hearers. He had by now begun to realise how very easily that might be done, even without taking into account the probable existence of unknown arbitrary laws and customs, such as that against which he had already offended. While he must trust more or less to chance for the avoidance of the latter, there were, as he began more and more clearly to perceive, many other subjects which wore antecedently a dangerous aspect, and which it would be in his power deliberately to shun. The longer he sojourned in this strange land, the more keenly alive did he become to numberless points in the incidents of daily life at which it contrasted sharply with what he had known in his own country. For instance—the instance was suggested to him here by the circumstance that they were all just then eating fruit and little rolls, much as they had done at breakfast—there was the matter of food.

As he sat in that pleasant place, where to look

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around was to find joy in pure light and colour, and whither every breeze brought on it a fresh fragrance, there came abruptly and vividly before his mind's eye a certain familiar street, glaring from end to end with ghastly stalls, between the rows of which he had often hurried, intent upon seeing and breathing as little as might be ; and again still more primitive scenes of slaughter, witnessed during his eastern travels, forming, if possible, a cruder prologue to an ensuing repast. And then the repasts themselves, all bearing more or less undisguised traces of these picturesque first beginnings. They seemed very far remote from anything he could imagine happening here ; in fact, he reassured himself by reflecting that it would probably not be in his power to make such habits and practices intelligible to his new acquaintances, even if he attempted a deliberate description, much less to disgust them by some allusion casually let fall.

A natural transition, hence, led him to think of the animal kingdom under a different aspect. That it was here represented solely by the human



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race he very strongly surmised ; but he promptly placed the question on the list of subjects to be for the present avoided, seeing in it many perilous possibilities. He remembered how he had already, in the course of the day, completely puzzled Lynmarch by an inquiry about beasts of burden, and had not succeeded at all in making it clear that he did not refer to some elaborate kind of mechanical invention. On the whole he judged that geography would furnish the safest topics ; but even here he found that some precautions were necessary ; for when he began to speak of his travels, Lynmarch contrived to tell him aside that Avril Destran knew nothing as yet of his having come overseas. On this hint Denis abstained from mention of his voyage, and began by expressing his wonder at the great variety and beauty of the vegetation in the country he had been travelling through, which surpassed, he truly said, any that he had ever seen. Avril, who informed him that she was something of a botanist, appeared to be much interested by his experiences, and as he had acquired some knowledge of the

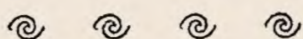
science during his medical studies, they compared notes, considerably to one another's amazement. Denis perceived that she was positively aghast at his description of a common stinging-nettle, and he himself listened with a tinge of professional incredulity to her account of a dandelion-like plant, the juice of which would rapidly mend a broken bone.

At last, however, he chanced to speak with especial admiration of a splendid and gigantic fir, distinguished by its curious parti-coloured cones, saying that he had passed through groves of them on his way. Avril looked unaccountably serious at this, and said with an effort, as if recalled against her wish to some painful recollection, "Oh, those grow only within a few miles of the seashore, so I have never seen them."

"It would be a short expedition in one of your swift cars," Denis suggested.

"Short enough indeed," she replied, "and too short. I often wish that we lived farther inland."

"I sometimes go to the shore," Elmède said softly. "It is always lovely there. And last



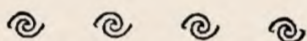
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time I almost think"—she lowered her voice still more—"I saw the Wall of Mist."

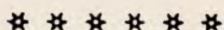
"That's the very reason, in a great part, at least, why I think we are too near," Avril said. "It would be all the better for you, my dear Mêda, if we could add another couple of hundred miles to that journey. 'Double as long and half as throng.'"

"I mightn't help to verify your old proverb even so. I'd throng there all the same," Elmède said, with a smile, which seemingly somewhat provoked Avril, whom it defied, and pleased Denis, a more unbiassed judge. Still, for the preservation of his neutrality, he deemed it expedient slightly to deflect their talk by beginning to calculate how long he had been making his way up from the coast on foot, and so in some measure recover his lost count of time. He was sure that he had not walked less on an average daily than ten miles, which would give twenty days at most, supposing him to have come straight inland, as the others inferred from his account of his route. No exacter estimate seemed to be practicable, nor had the

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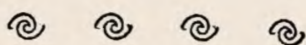
point much importance now. He was far more interested by what Avril had said about the sea ; it might explain, he thought, the existence of that wide tract, beautiful and uninhabited, which he had crossed in such complete solitude. And this conjecture strengthened with his growing sense of how pervasive was the influence of that mysterious dread, under whose shadow he had first come into touch with the lives it brooded over. If it were so, that spacious wilderness indeed bore eloquent testimony.



THE next time he was alone with Lynmarch, Denis inquired into this matter. They had strolled out of doors again, and taken a river-side path, along which they might fall in with Destran returning. "Though when once he gets among his beloved electrical machinery," Avril had observed as they started, "it's impossible to say for how long he will disappear. Imagine a sleepless child with a room full of new toys, and leave to sit up till it is tired ; that's very much his frame of mind." She spoke a little aggrievedly, showing, Denis thought, something of the anxious hen - and - duckling disposition, which mingled quaintly with her aspect of blithe and irresponsible youth, as she stood looking after them, a golden-headed, wild-violet robed figure, framed in a garlanded archway.

"Destran was sleepless enough last night,

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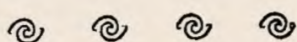
certainly," Lynmarch observed as they walked on, "for after we returned from the lake, he drove to the strand and back again, which didn't leave much time before morning."

"Well, no," said Denis ; "and it seems remarkably quick work to me, when I consider that I was weeks coming one way. The sight of Destran whirling along would have electrified me, for I had begun to think I was monarch of all I surveyed a good while before you appeared to dispute my right."

"You might easily have wandered about in that region for a year of weeks without meeting anybody," said Lynmarch, "for it is quite uninhabited, and hardly ever travelled through. Our own house is as near to the coast as any in the country. We can't, of course, count the observation-stations, as they are out at sea. Anyhow, they lie a hundred miles apart."

"A sort of coast-guard service, I suppose?" said Denis.

"Well, guarding is scarcely the word," said Lynmarch, "for their purpose has been aggressive



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rather than defensive ; though indeed it's many a long year since much has been attempted beyond keeping a look-out, and that not altogether efficiently, as we have just seen, assuming——"

"The truth of my story." Denis completed the sentence, in which Lynmarch had stopped short uncomfortably.

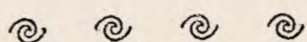
"To be quite honest with you, yes," he said. "But I should add that the more veracious your account of yourself is, the more difficult you will find it to realise *how* incredible such statements must appear to us all. We have, however, verified them to a small extent. Destran's expedition last night was to look for your canoe, which he found exactly as you had described it. Of course he left it there undisturbed."

"Couldn't you devise some further tests?" said Denis. "I'll willingly co-operate with you in any way I can. No doubt the proceedings which brought me under your notice heighten your suspicions ; for I am now aware that I was committing a serious offence ; and I can recognise in a measure the necessity for a prohibition, which

at first seemed to me so unreasonable. I suppose, for one thing, you would otherwise be continually subject to such false alarms as I created."

Denis, in so supposing, unconsciously took somewhat the tone of a discoverer, for this obvious conjecture had occurred to him only while he was speaking. Lynmarch looked hard at him for a moment. "If you were acting, you would be doing it uncommonly well," he said, "but I don't believe you are. I might be more prudent to keep my opinion to myself for a bit longer ; however, there it is. To act upon it immediately would be a different thing. I still think we should be well advised to put off hearing your report until you have lived among us for a time."

"Certainly," said Denis. "I know that if our positions were reversed, I should wish for an opportunity of observing what sort of a witness you promised to be. The only objection to delay that I can see, from your point of view, is that you are giving me leisure to concoct more elaborate and plausible fiction."



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"As I have already said, my point of view doesn't include such results as at all probable," Lynmarch replied, "and it's quite compatible with our giving you any information that you want meanwhile, or putting you in the way of getting it for yourself, within limits—of not leaving us, I mean."

"The Longer Catechism would be a joke to me if I asked half the questions there are in my mind this minute," said Denis, "were it even only on the subject of that strange barrier, which you call the Wall of Mist. One of them is how it comes to be associated, as apparently you do associate it, with that other still stranger mist and music."

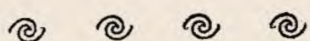
Lynmarch hesitated for a moment before he answered. "Am I to take it for granted that you are here utterly ignorant?"

"Utterly," said Denis.

"Then to begin with, this wall encircles us completely, and of what lies beyond it, nobody," said Lynmarch, "knows any more than they do of the moon's other face. On the sea it drifts

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to and fro, at a distance from us which is believed never to be more than five hundred, or less than fifty miles, varying at irregular intervals. There are several reasons why we connect it with that other vast and awful mystery of the Music. In the first place there is its so-called zone of repulsion, the space just three furlongs wide, which runs at its base, and which some unknown property makes inaccessible at any point, or by any means. Innumerable have been the attempts to enter it, but from the remotest times to the present day with the same result. Whether it is approached by water or by air, something that cannot be described or explained interposes and arrests farther advance. The smallest skiff of a boat, or a fleet of the hugest iron-clads charging at full speed, never crossed that invisible line ; submarines and air-ships alike have failed. As nothing at all resembling this power is known in nature, except in the case of the Mist of the Music, it gives us strong grounds for conjecturing a connection between the two. Moreover, on a few occasions, at enormous intervals, the wall



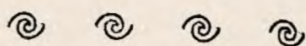
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has been seen to glow briefly with the same marvellous morning-blue that comes at the moment of passing, which again tends to strengthen such a theory. But the Music has never been heard near it, except when some observer has chanced to pass away. I can hardly conceive that I am telling you anything new ; however, it may help you to appreciate our difficulty in accepting your assertion that you have come from beyond this barrier."

"Undoubtedly it does," said Denis.

"The difficulty is increased by present circumstances," said Lynmarch, "for your claim is not unprecedented. Now and then somebody has cropped up with a story of the kind, invariably proved to be entirely devoid of foundation ; and this is always more likely to happen at a time when the Wall of Mist has come unusually near the coast. That not unnaturally causes excitement, which in some minds may lead to wild fancies and even delusions. So although your case differs in more than one respect from any other on record, we must take into account the

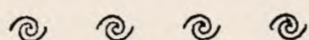
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fact that the wall has of late approached within almost its shortest distance."

"I remember your sister spoke of having seen it from the shore," Denis said ; "but it seemed to have given her pleasure."

"Ah, yes," said Lynmarch ; "yet that mood of hers will pass, I believe, with the effects of the shock I told you about, and then her feelings will be more in accordance with those of the people whose instinct it is to keep ten score miles or so between themselves and the possibility of such a glimpse. Indeed the existence of that deserted belt, stretching for thousands of leagues along our coasts, bears striking testimony to the strength and universality of mankind's shrinking from every association with the great mystery. But as it happens, Maine, you have come upon a household where that sentiment is in some degree at least in abeyance. There have been events in our lives of late years which dispose the Destrans and ourselves to feel an interest about these unanswerable enigmas of destiny profound enough to overcome the instinct that



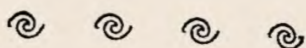
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bids us turn away from them. You might, however, easily have met with people who would not endure any allusion to the matter ; who would have hidden it away from you, ignoring it in silence. And would so, perhaps, have let slip a chance of solving an infinitely fateful problem."

" I have been very fortunate, then," said Denis ; " for it seems to me that my interests all lie in the same direction." Yet in his companion's words, and it may be still more in the tone of them, there was something that disquieted him vaguely—something hopeful, he thought ; and who was he that he should inspire hopes of illumining communications ? That seemed to him an inversion of all probabilities.

They had been walking along by the river, which now led them to the entrance of a wonderful little wooded glen, where it was spanned by a bridge of white marble, embroidered with delicate brown-veined ivy. On the parapet they sat down fronting the green-vaulted chamber of the dell, with its tremulous lights of sunshine and

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foam, and its stiller shadows. Both of them remained for a while meditatively silent, and then Denis said : " I've been thinking over a list of discreet questions ; and I think I shall have some difficulty in framing them, so as to avoid giving you the information you don't wish to receive at present."

" I can well understand it," Lynmarch said. " But, do you know, the more I consider the subject, the more convinced I feel that we should adhere to our resolution, patience-trying though it may be. It's the best way of preventing continual misapprehensions. As it is, some of the things you have said from time to time seem to prove you familiar with a state of civilisation so enormously remote from our own that I can only account for them by my own ignorance of facts which would give them a completely different aspect. For instance, you have casually mentioned beggars and servants, and cities and money, as if they were for you matters of every-day experience ; but I cannot by any means suppose that you have actually had knowledge of the world



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with such conditions still existing. Then I've been wondering what on earth you meant this morning when you talked about your machines as if you seriously thought they had life and sense, much as a baby sometimes will talk if it sees one moving. And I noticed the same thing again on our walk, when you were describing the queer sort of poisonous dust, that you said you had often seen in the air under trees. Now these are, no doubt, misconceptions on my part ; and you see I can't correct them by looking about me, as you to some extent can do, if you are puzzled by our talk. Probably it has much the same effect upon you."

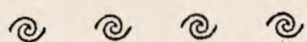
"A complementary effect rather," said Denis, "for what you say often makes me feel myself to be as utter a barbarian as I must appear. With perfect honesty I can say that so far you seem to me to be centuries ahead of us, except as regards a single point—one, it is true, of very great importance to me." Denis, who was thinking of music, did not perceive that his companion's countenance brightened at the mention of this

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inferiority, and he continued : “ I may add that my self-satisfaction is slightly restored when I consider the extraordinary natural advantages which you clearly have enjoyed, and which must heavily discount the amount of credit due to a nation for making such progress. Unless, of course, you adopt the theory held by some people, that nothing except the dire necessity of getting over all kinds of unchancy obstacles can keep the human race moving on. It’s not my view. I’ve often seen a wasp with its wings sticky make a tremendous buzzing to get them clear, which it otherwise wouldn’t have made ; but then it would have flown much farther without any buzzing.”

“ Your apologue has too many technical terms,” Lynmarch complained, “ though if wasps and wings are in any way equivalent to ships and sails, its purport is plain enough. But I won’t ask you for explanatory notes at present. Let us keep to a lop-sided catechism.

“ There is a question, then, about this morning’s strange event, which occurs to me,” said Denis, “ namely, whether what we saw happens rarely



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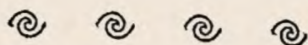
enough to make our having seen it a very exceptional experience."

"That can be most clearly answered by statistics," said Lynmarch. "In this district, which is one thousand miles square, there are some hundred thousand inhabitants, and of these, when a thousand days have gone by, about one thousand, roughly speaking, will have passed away. So the chances, obviously, were much against your witnessing a departure on the day after your arrival; yet there was nothing extremely improbable about it."

Denis calculated for a moment. Calculations were not a strong point with him, but he found these sufficiently simple. Then he said: "I suppose, however, that in this particular case there were two circumstances which did increase the chances against it. I mean its happening out of doors, and to a young man. Though, indeed, now that I think of it, an old person is a sight which I haven't seen since I came here."

"How can you tell that?" Lynmarch inquired in evident surprise.

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"Well, of course, I can only judge by appearances," Denis replied, rather taken aback.

"But what clue could they give you, except in the case of a child?" said Lynmarch. "You must possess some curious faculty unknown to us, if you can determine one another's ages by any outward signs."

"Don't you ever grow old here?" said Denis.

Lynmarch looked perplexed. "Apparently you attach some very peculiar meaning to the word 'old,'" he said.

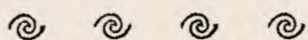
"And as I mustn't try to explain it, we can't pursue that subject further," said Denis.

"But why do you infer that such an event is especially unlikely to happen out of doors?" said Lynmarch. "Most people spend quite as much of their time in the open air as they do under a roof."

"Most people, but not most invalids," said Denis.

"Surely we needn't take that into account," said Lynmarch, "so few as they are."

"What? Do people never fall ill here either?" said Denis.



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"Oh, accidents do happen, of course," said Lynmarch, "but so seldom that they can't be considered appreciably to augment the number of people indoors at any given time."

"Still," said Denis, "the proportion of invalids to whom the end comes is always so vastly larger than that of any ordinary persons—or am I wrong there too?"

"You are, indeed, very completely, for no such fact exists," said Lynmarch. "People have passed away during illness, but a coincidence of the kind is exceedingly rare."

"Am I to understand that no sort of bodily infirmity leads to this end?" said Denis.

"Certainly," said Lynmarch.

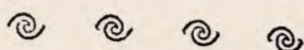
"And in short that one person never seems more likely to be taken than another, be his circumstances what they may?" said Denis.

Again Lynmarch assented.

"And is there no premonitory sign except the Mist and the Music, just as we saw and heard them to-day?" said Denis.

"None whatever," said Lynmarch. "But

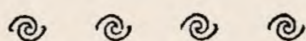
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there have been innumerable superstitions connected with the subject ; this thing or that supposed to be unlucky to see or say or do, and so forth. All real belief in them is long since extinct, yet queer little phantoms of it linger on with wonderful persistence. It's sometimes surprising to find that a sensible person will be depressed if the moon has a halo, or will entertain misgivings about the number of seeds in a pod. But I need not say that these notions are wholly irrational."

"And I believe I need hardly ask whether it is ever possible to avert the coming of the Music of the Mist," said Denis, "or for the person summoned to escape."

"Never, most assuredly," said Lynmarch. "To turn back the stars in their courses could not be a more frantic endeavour. Nevertheless, superstitions about the possibility of warding it off, or eluding it, have been even rarer than those about portents and omens, and not only wilder and more absurd, but more mischievous too. Indeed you may already have seen something of their effects on the very face of the country."



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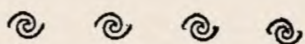
"How so?" said Denis.

"It is likely that they were partly the origin of the deserted tract all along our coast," said Lynmarch. "Indisputably they were the cause of a very serious evil, no traces of which now survive except in histories. For a superstitious belief that certain places were less often than others visited by the Music of the Mist brought about that crowding together into towns, which led to so much trouble, and spoiled the lives of so many generations, before the custom was given up. That happened in the remote past, when the people turned their minds to an investigation of the fact itself, instead of weaving fancies about it out of their own hopes and fears, a change which put an end to an amount of folly and fraud almost inconceivable."

"May I assume that to command this means of passing away is as little in any man's power as to shun it?" said Denis. "Otherwise I should think it would seem a temptingly easy way to those who are weary of the world."

"We are alike impotent to invoke it or to

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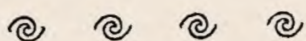


evade it," said Lynmarch, "yet just as by a natural instinct those who dread its coming flee at the approach of the sound, those few who are eager to go will strive as vainly to pursue it. You saw instances of both impulses last night, when your music sent a party of girls running for their lives, whilst it drew my sister towards it, because her wishes are now, unhappily, the opposite of theirs."

"I remember," Denis said, with a twinge of remorse ; for Elmède's passionate appeal had not ceased to haunt him upbraidingly.

"Such instincts are so deeply rooted," Lynmarch continued, "that it would be hard to form a conjecture whether this one will ever dwindle out of existence. But there is no more inexorable fact in nature than that no man has ever prolonged or cut short his own, or any other person's life by any action that he has done or omitted to do."

"That is, not in this particular way ?" said Denis. "Surely you can't make such a statement with respect to all the other countless modes of



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exit. If there were nothing else, are not the murderer and the slayer of himself known among you ? ”

“ Those seem to me to be strange and violent figures of speech, the bearing of which on our present discussion I can't at all make out,” said Lynmarch, “ and I'm even more thoroughly at a loss about your reference to other modes of exit. What exit can you mean ? ”

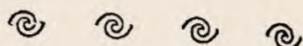
“ I meant of passing away,” said Denis.

Lynmarch was beginning an eager question, but checked himself, and said : “ I have no knowledge of any other.”

The two men looked at each other in a perplexed silence. How he should propound his next question was in itself a problem difficult for Denis to solve satisfactorily. At last he said : “ What would happen to you if you tumbled down there ? ” He pointed to the river, which ran some thirty or forty feet below them, foaming among boulders.

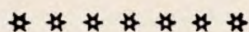
“ I should be badly smashed up,” said Lynmarch.

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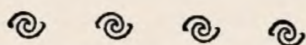
"Well, suppose your fractures included a broken neck ; what would the result of that be ?" said Denis.

"Unpleasant enough, of course," Lynmarch was beginning, when they were interrupted by the arrival of a car, which came gliding over the bridge, and drew up beside them. Destran alighted from it, and joined them, looking pleased and alert, as if he had spent his day enjoyably. He was full of an interesting discovery about some properties of electrified opals, made in the course of his work at the laboratory ; and thus their talk for the present turned aside from the brink of what might have been, Denis thought, a discovery far more significant.



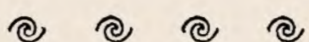
DUSK had gathered by the time that they returned to the house. They entered it through the great window, which had been glimmering softly to them all across the lawn from a frame-work of fretted marble and carven cedar-wood. This was the end window of the long library where Destran wanted to look up some passages in various scientific works, with reference to his electrical studies. He had the aid of the whole household in his researches, for his mother and Elmède soon appeared; but the scattered volumes which he required could not be very quickly collected. The quest among the bookshelves suggested to Denis an idea which might well have occurred to him sooner, he thought, since it was simply the obvious one of reading as a source of knowledge. There must here be all manner of historical and philosophical treatises

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from which he could get information to satisfy his curiosity about this strange land. These he might consult unhindered by the difficulties which met him at every turn in conversation, and which threatened to become even more embarrassing. With what should he begin ? he pondered. Not that he had any doubt as to what subject interested him most, for the mysterious event which he had that day beheld dwarfed everything else into comparative insignificance. His uncertainty was about the department of literature that would supply him with what he sought to learn—the utmost that could be known about the Music of the Mist. It was doubtless comprised in Philosophy ; but among those vague and vasty fields he would lose much time if he wandered into them without a guide, so he determined that he would, when Lynmarch was at leisure, ask him for advice in the matter.

As he strayed, meanwhile, along the shelves, his eye was caught by a volume of moderate size, lettered *A Philosophical History of Religion*, and thinking that the title promised well, he took the



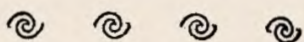
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book in his hand, and began to glance at its pages, while he waited until he could ask Lynmarch's opinion about it. Happening to look up presently he saw that Elmède was standing near, and watching him with an expression of the deepest concern, not unmixed with dismay. His occupation seemed so evidently to be the cause of it that he was wondering whether he had done amiss in touching the volume, when Elmède herself enlightened him. "Oh, see here," she called to the others, who were at a little distance, "do you know what we have done? We have let Denis Maine get hold of those terrible Histories."

At this her brother and the Destrans came up, all showing some degree of consternation. "I ought to have warned him," Lynmarch said. "Still, he wasn't likely to stumble on them, covered up in that out-of-the-way corner."

"It was partly my own fault," said Elmède, "for I pulled back the curtain just now when I was rummaging and forgot to pull it over again." And Denis noticed that a heavy, dark-purple

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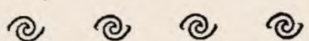
drapery, hung on a silver rod, had been drawn aside to disclose these shelves.

"But I'll put it back at once," he said to Elmède. "I really have hardly looked at a line, and, of course, if that is your wish, I won't open it again."

"It seems to me," Destran said, "that as Maine must hear about these things, if he doesn't know about them already, he couldn't perhaps do better than read one of the Histories for himself. Whatever reasons we may have for preferring him to remain ignorant of our past, we should find his being so a most serious hindrance in the investigations we are hoping to make. And it would put him in a false position too. Don't you see that, Elmède?"

"Oh," said Elmède, sighing and looking away, "I don't want to see it."

"I believe that Elmède hates as much as I do," Avril said, "to think of our detestable beginnings; and all the more when we have to imagine how they must appear in a stranger's eyes."



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"It's not so much that," said Elmède, "as a fear I have—you speak of a hindrance to our inquiries, Destran, but it seems to me that if Denis Maine studies our ancient history, a far more insuperable obstacle is likely to arise. For what could more probably dissuade him from telling us anything at all than his discovery of our forefathers' attitude towards people who related new facts, or expressed inconvenient opinions? I shouldn't wonder, for my part, if reading the account of our mad, persecuting ancestors made him determine that he would strictly keep his own counsel—to our bitter disappointment. That, I confess, is what I am thinking of most. But if there were nothing else, it would be sad enough to know that he was tracing the connection between ourselves and a race capable of such follies and cruelties."

"You're not making sufficient allowance, Elmède, are you, for the effect of the huge time-gulf across which that connection is traced?" said Destran. "It is not as if you need imagine that he could suppose himself to be reading about a state of things which ever existed except in the

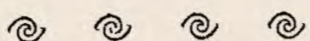
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remotest past. He would hardly reason from what happened five thousand years ago to what could conceivably happen now-a-days."

"How can he tell that our minds may not have changed very little in fifty centuries?" said Elmède. "He doesn't know enough of us to be able to judge."

"There is this much in what Elmède says, I think," said Lynmarch, "that it might be rather fairer to ourselves if Maine saw something more of us before making himself acquainted with these lamentable old records. Still, on the whole, I agree with you, Destran, that to delay would be inexpedient, and that the fear of his drawing unfavourable conclusions about us from any of them is purely fantastic."

To Denis, glancing from one speaker to the other as this debate went on, the situation seemed curious and almost comic. Here were these four young people, who would not have appeared out of place in some region where demi-gods dwelt amid "an ampler ether, a diviner air," and whose actual home surroundings, gracious and comely,

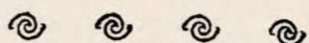


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beseemed them well ; and here was himself, a tramping, fiddling stranger, much of whose previous experience, could he make it intelligible to them, would, he believed, fill them with aversion and disgust. Yet they were discussing with unmistakable anxiety the impression which a study of their history in by-gone ages was likely to produce upon this unknown vagrant. It struck him as an odd reversal of what might have been expected in circumstances which tended to make his opinion a matter of small account in comparison with theirs ; but it was unquestionably the case. So he hastened to declare his sincere conviction that he would be entirely uninfluenced by his historical researches, whatever they might reveal.

“ If the facts you mentioned had belonged to last year, instead of to centuries past,” he said to Elmède, “ they could not possibly alter my views of anybody or anything that I have seen since I came here.” He did not find it quite easy to give the assurance with due seriousness, because he was thinking the while how grotesquely monstrous would be the crimes that could indeed

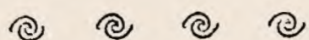
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fling their shadow across a chasm of five thousand years, and cast a slur upon this dark-eyed maiden. However, he felt that Lynmarch and Destran, at any rate, were like himself half-amused at the apprehensions which he was deprecating ; and Lynmarch at once said to his sister : “ There, Elmède, you see that Denis Maine is less suspicious than you think. You may trust him to trust us ; but you mustn’t plague yourself about these dreary antiquities and iniquities. Go and help Destran with his drawing, dear child, and leave us here in the Ecclesiastical Ages.”

Elmède shook her head a little mournfully at this, but moved away with Destran to the other end of the room.

“ I’m not quite sure,” Lynmarch said then, “ that I didn’t slightly over-state my confidence in the result of your studies. It’s all very well to talk about bearing in mind the lapse of centuries, but when you are confronted with the hard facts themselves, you mayn’t find it easy to consider anything else.” He pulled a few volumes out of the shelf, and piling them on the table,



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sat down opposite the small heap, which he contemplated with folded arms and a rueful expression, as if it were something he would gladly have abolished. His evident wish to forestall harsh criticisms began to whet Denis's curiosity about the nature of the past which he was expected to judge so adversely. All that he had met with in this strange land hitherto having made him feel himself entirely at a disadvantage, he was not wholly displeased at a prospect of coming upon even far-off events which might contrast in a less mortifying fashion with his own world's history. Yet, in a way, he was loth to anticipate any such flaw in what so nearly seemed true Paradise.

Lynmarch continued : " You will have gathered from what we said just now that our earliest records are most melancholy ones. In fact, even making all due allowance for exaggeration and distortion in the accounts that have come down to us, the astounding state of things they indicate can hardly be credited or realised. To assume universal insanity as its atmosphere might help

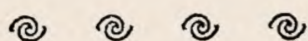
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you in imagining a world whose inhabitants occupied themselves, generation after generation, in making one another miserable on the pretext that their views differed about some so-called religious matter."

Denis deemed it expedient to receive this startling fact with an impassivity which, he fancied, was unexpected; and he merely inquired without comment, "Is the history of that time to be found in the volumes there?"

"In some of them," said Lynmarch. "The others are rather part of that history itself. This, for instance, is one of the most famous of its class."

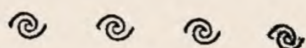
The volume handed to Denis was entitled *The Voice*, and while he turned over its pages, Lynmarch watched him closely, as if on the look out for signs of recognition. None appearing, Lynmarch resumed: "It's only one among a series of works which claimed to be divine revelations. Many of them have been preserved, and many more are known to have perished. They were all much alike in their main outlines,



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starting with the origin of everything, which is naturally attributed to a man imagined in a magnifying mirror, and going on to relate fantastic legends about his subsequent dealings with the world in the character of its supreme Being. These are always represented as having been communicated by him to some other man, not so much magnified, whom he has commissioned to instruct the human race in matters which, for no apparent reason, have the utmost importance for them, but of which the majority must always remain ignorant. Accordingly, the larger portion of every such book is devoted to the sayings of this inspired teacher, and of the pupils to whom he transmitted a share of his authority. Now, their discourses consist in part of moral precepts, respecting the intrinsic value of which anybody can form his own opinion from experience ; but they lay far more stress upon assertions which are altogether unverifiable and not even intelligible, being often quite meaningless propositions, and assent to these is demanded from their followers as the one cardinal virtue, a bounden duty,

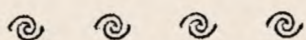
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dereliction of which is an unpardonable sin, entailing the heaviest penalties both here and hereafter. I know I must seem to be repeating the ravings of lunatics," he said, interrupting himself apologetically, "and no doubt you can hardly conceive that they were at one time generally accepted as utterances of the highest wisdom."

"I find what you say extremely interesting anyhow," Denis replied, with a discreet economy of truth. He was bound, he reflected, to keep precedents to himself.

"You will see that worse was to come," Lynmarch continued, "for as people obviously could not always believe, or even imagine that they believed, what was required, these teachers found it convenient to devise systems of outward actions, the performance of which, they said, entirely atoned for a lack of any ideas in the mind. The prescribed actions differed slightly in the various sects, but were all so far alike that they consisted chiefly of performing certain ceremonies, and repeating certain formulas, while the teachers declared themselves alone to have

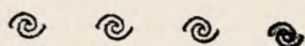


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the power of performing and pronouncing certain others, and of handing it on to whomsoever they might choose. Thus they turned themselves into a tribe of what were called priests and ecclesiastics, and established institutions which appear to have been known indifferently as churches and temples. These terms are, of course, now obsolete, and scholars cannot determine their correct application," he interpolated, with a touch of relief in his tone. "As they had acquired vast influence and great privileges, their anxiety to retain these caused intense jealousy between the rival teachers, and they were able at times to fill the whole world with dissensions. The darkest period perhaps was that known to history as the Ecclesiastical Ages ; and the religious parties then predominant were two sects, who both claimed the volume you have there, *The Voice*, as their authority—the sects of the Mist and of the Mantle."

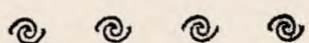
"And what was the distinction between them ?" Denis asked, with some eagerness, for he hoped he might be coming upon the track of the mystery which that day had shown him,

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and from which his thoughts had not since wandered far.

“ Well,” said Lynmarch, “ it is rather a typical instance of the imbecility which characterises such disputes, being a difference of opinion about the nature of the dimness that comes with the Music. We now generally speak of it as a mist, but of course no one supposes it essentially to resemble any other substance that we so call, and controversies on the subject seem to have raged from time immemorial. To some people it suggested not so much a mist as a woven fabric of supernaturally subtle texture, and they held that it should be regarded as a mantle ; hence the two sects. It happened that this sacred book, *The Voice*, is especially abundant in ambiguous statements by which both parties could easily support their views, quoting such passages as : *I have clad him with my garment*, or : *They are hidden amid the clouds of the morning*. There is still in existence, written upon these two fragmentary sentences alone, a mass of commentaries positively amazing. But it is much more



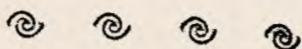
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amazing to see with what success the professionally religious were here able to play their incendiary part, considering that the question was one of no practical significance at all."

By this time Denis had ceased to listen with an expectation of hearing anything that could justify him in feeling himself a superior person even with respect to his ancestry. But Lynmarch's tone now waxed so very grave, and as it were reluctant, that his hearer surmised at length the brink of some ghastly disclosure.

"Such widespread folly and fraud," he said, "would be a mortifying spectacle, were it merely from an intellectual standpoint, and ethically considered the effects were infinitely more deplorable. The tap-root of the evil of course was that people believed themselves to be living under rule of a Being who had originated, and who still presided over a system so absurd and unjust. Its developments were not perhaps more atrocious than we might have foreseen; but the actual history of them makes an impression that is extremely humiliating to any pride of race. You

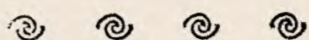
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will not fully realise this until you have read these works, which will show you what the wreckage of happiness must have been, and what positive cruelties were not uncommonly practised. Indeed the evidence puts it beyond a doubt that some people were shut up miserably in prison, and released only by their summons from this world—inhumanity which hardly bears thinking about."

Denis, not without scruples about hypocrisy, refrained from mentioning how very meagrely he expected to sup on horrors. "The details of such exceedingly ancient history cannot be otherwise than obscure," he said; "but does it appear whether your people came to acquiesce in the impenetrability of these mysteries, or whether they abandoned their zeal for making converts only with their convictions?"

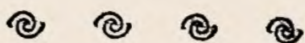
"To do our forefathers justice," Lynmarch said, "they recognised the detestable folly of attempting to force their opinions upon one another long before they perceived the more harmless futility of the opinions themselves. As for acquiescence,



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that mood has never been prevalent at any period. I doubt that we are any less dissatisfied with our own ignorance than those ecclesiastical tribes were with the heresies of other people. But we look upon it from an utterly different point of view. We no longer think that our hopes of removing it can have any basis except a clearer and deeper knowledge of the nature of things, only to be gained by the widest and wildest research in every direction. A mere blind groping it does sometimes seem to be, so far as that ultimate object is concerned. Yet it steadily tends to become less work at random, now that so many crude and coarse methods and habits of thought have been eliminated. We must surely have made some progress, for instance, since the time when it was a common custom for people to carry about with them always any little possessions that they especially valued, because they supposed themselves liable to be at any moment caught up bodily into the skies. It is impossible to imagine that anyone could nowadays be influenced by such a superstition."

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Though Denis's private opinion was that, even without resorting to Central African rites, he could adduce examples of present-day superstition quite as gross, and much more repulsive, he only observed, "I infer that it is a very long time since you disproved, as you seem to have done, the bodily ascension of these departed."

"Ages ago," said Lynmarch. "The invention of certain delicate philosophical instruments led to the discovery that at the instant when the Music ceases, and the Mist folds upon itself, everything it had enveloped is resolved into an infinitely tenuous gas, and dissipated through space. This discovery at once put an end to innumerable speculations about the destiny of those assumed to have been corporeally borne away, the speed at which they were conveyed, the stars whither they were bound, and so forth. But how it comes to pass we are still seeking to ascertain. Our men of science are at present inclining rather strongly to a theory that the mechanism of it, so to speak, is the coincidence, under some peculiar conditions, of the vibrations which form a living



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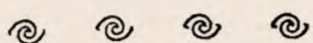
body with those which form the musical notes. But that explanation, even if it were proved to be the true one, would not bring us much further. I mention it now, Maine, to show you that our instinctive avoidance of musical sounds is not simply a matter of association, nor our proscription of them solely a precautionary measure against false alarms."

"I see," said Denis, "that on this hypothesis, the production of them might seem a hazardous experiment."

"Certainly," said Lymarch. "In fact, a few cases have been known of unhappy persons who deliberately devoted themselves to the making of music with the direct object of bringing about the end of their lives. They completely failed in accomplishing this, I need not say, and their conduct was regarded as excusable only by the melancholy state of their minds at the time."

"I should have thought," said Denis, "that the experiment would be on other grounds tempting to eager inquirers. Isn't it ever tried by them?"

"It is indeed," said Lynmarch, "though rarely, and under great difficulties, for it is generally disapproved of, even by our most ardent and open-minded men of science, and permitted only subject to rigorous restrictions. Still there are always some students who will allow nothing to baffle them in their quest for a sign from the world beyond the Music of the Mist, if such a world be by any means cognisable to us on our present plane of existence." Denis noticed that Lynmarch, while speaking, kept his eyes steadily fixed on the heap of books before him, as if to prevent himself from surprising any information which the countenance of his companion might unconsciously have given him. Yet at the same time he was waiting, Denis fancied, with a sort of wistfulness, for some to be volunteered. But Denis had none that he desired to communicate either by word or look. "I think myself," Lynmarch added, "that in course of time our feeling about music may be to some extent modified, because there is possibly in it an element of superstition, surviving from the primitive ages



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when priests fostered every fear, and apparently feigned to possess a power over these mysterious sounds. However, it will be many a long day before any perceptible change can take place. That is, of course, unless some new light should break upon us."

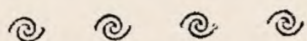
Denis listened with no small chagrin. In the first place it was a positive pain and grief to him to hear his beloved art spoken of in solemn tones as a thing terrible and forbidden, or if tolerated at all, only as a perilous and desperate means to an end. Then what Lynmarch said seemed to extinguish a hope that Denis had been cherishing on this very subject : a hope that he might be able gradually to overcome this strange, unnatural prejudice on the part of his new friends, and by persuading them to hear his music, open up for them a source of pleasure, which would add what seemed to him the one good thing lacking in the circumstances of their lives. That he had a personal motive in so hoping he did not attempt to conceal from himself. A craving for the tones of his violin had come upon him, and was given a

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keener edge by the thought of what delight it would be to play his Sleep and Dream melody to Elmède in a mood of tranquil enjoyment. But now it seemed to him that he must no longer look forward to such a pleasant prospect. He agreed too entirely with Lynmarch that it would be idle to anticipate any rapid change in a sentiment so substantially grounded. And as for Lynmarch's last words about a new light, Denis had begun to feel even painfully aware of how little likely it was to come through him.

Thus the conversation was closing with a certain degree of disappointment, on both sides, Denis believed, when Lynmarch said, as he saw Destran coming towards their corner, "I find that I shall have to be away to-morrow, but my sister wants to show you some favourite bits in these woods, and I know that they are planning an expedition for the purpose. And the day after I am in hopes that we shall be able to do something more stirring."

Both suggestions gave a pleasant turn to Denis's thoughts. A day among the woods in Elmède's

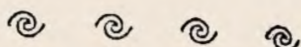


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company, with a prospect vaguely more adventurous beyond, was an out-look the remembrance of which would glimmer back alluringly into his consciousness on the morrow, across the threshold of sleep ; and when the party presently broke up, he went to his room in good spirits.

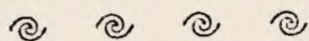
Next morning they all met at an early breakfast, and talked over their plans for the day. Lynmarch's were already fixed by an engagement to visit some distant friends, which would keep him away until evening ; but the others seemingly had some difficulty in making up their minds how to spend the time. On one point everybody was agreed, that they should go to see the Swinging-Blossom Falls. These, however, were not far away, and might be seen to best advantage towards sunset, so the question was how to occupy the interval. Nobody was in a hurry to decide, for the gold and green terrace where they were assembled had surroundings which could hardly be improved upon. But at last Destran said : "Elmède would like to do something, only that she is half ashamed of it."

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He made the announcement with quiet confidence, as if he were repeating some matter of fact that had come to his knowledge ; and Elmède, who was sitting out of sight behind a garlanded pillar, looked round it through a veil of small fine leaves, that made sunshine quiver on the waved darkness of her hair. Half ashamed her smile was, but she did not contradict Destran's statement. "I don't know why," she said, "but I *was* thinking that it would be nice to go angling for pitcherines. It's so long since we did. But of course it's rather absurd, and I daresay Denis Maine wouldn't care about it. The fancy just came into my mind, and I shouldn't have told you only for Destran ; we shall easily find something much better than that."

Everybody denied the possibility of anything better, and Denis saw congratulatory glances, as if at some happy omen, pass between the other three. "Why, you know they are particularly fine in the Clearwell River," Avril said, "and to angle slowly along it on our way to the Falls will be delightful. It was the very thing we wanted

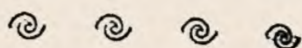


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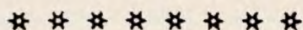
as an excuse for dawdling there." Lynmarch, who was just getting into his car, said that he wished he could have stayed to go with them ; and Destran sped with alacrity to fetch the angling rods. These were slender, flexible sticks about seven feet long, made of some light wood, fitted into a tapering silver tube, from the end of which dangled two or three small loops of silver wire.

On the way to the river Denis examined his curiously, wondering what kind of fish a pitcherine might be, and thinking with considerable interest that he had at last come upon the track of life other than human existing in this strange land. But when they reached the river in its charming glen, he discovered that he was quite mistaken. Pitcherines, he learned, were not fish at all, but small plants which grew in rock-crevices, always under water, and generally in nooks of extremely difficult access. From a tuft of dim-green, heart-shaped leaves sprang a short, semi-transparent stalk, bearing a single blossom, hollow and fantastically curved, with a very distinct lip and handle, tiny and fragile, as if blown out of liquid gems.

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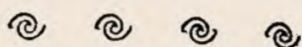


Their colouring was gem-like too ; up through the clear water, in pools under shelving ledges, the glint of purest carmine or azure or violet struck as vivid as flame, to the betrayal of their hiding-places. To espy one, however, was not always to secure it. The process of slipping a little loop over the delicate head, and round the more substantial leaves, of thus twitching the plant from its fibre-gripped crevice, and then drawing it safely to shore, through contrary currents and other complications, demanded much practised adroitness and judgment on the angler's part. It had a fascination of its own, also, Denis thought, scarcely lessened by the knowledge that it involved no bitter struggle for life, followed by the despatch of a gasping, writhing captive. In fact he felt rather relieved at finding that Elmède's favourite pastime was devoid of any such incidents.



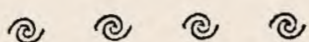
IT was Avril, chiefly, who explained these things to him, and gave him lessons in the art of letting his pliant rod float with the stream, or stiffen itself against the grip of the current, as circumstances required. Her botanical lore made it natural that she should describe to the stranger the object of their quest, while Elmède and Destran sauntered on together. Avril did not confine herself to the pitcherines, and some of the topics she touched upon interested Denis more. Her talk was partly of the Lynmarch household, with whose members her friendship had been lifelong and intimate. Lynmarch, she said, had now nearly finished the scientific work in which he had formerly co-operated with her late husband, whose important discovery it was to make known, and he had set his heart on completing it by the end of that year. That

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Avril's heart was set on this too, and that she viewed with a certain impatience any thing or person likely to cause delay, became clear to Denis from sundry slight involuntary turns of speech and fitting changes of countenance, which every now and then revealed her thoughts, as the demeanour of a small bird reveals its desires and apprehensions.

She went on to speak of the Lynmarches' strange affliction in the almost simultaneous loss of their parents, and of the uneasiness, which all her friends had felt, about its effects upon Elmède. But from this event she darted away as speedily as she could, plainly with an uncontrollable shrinking. "All so lovely and delightful," she said as if to herself, in a quick, frightened undertone, spreading out her hands, with a glance round into the world of sunshine and blossom-rife greenery, and swift, bright water, "and all gone in one moment like a broken bubble—we mustn't think about that." It was evident that she would not trouble him by showing signs of an eagerness for communications from him, such as he somehow grew less and less willing to impart.

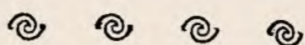


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"We have been trying without much success for a long while," Avril went on, "to coax Elmède back to her old pursuits ; and that is why we were so glad this morning when she of her own accord suggested this angling. It is the first thing that she has seemed really to care to do. My son is over-joyed." Her tone, Denis thought, implied that Destran had special grounds for concerning himself about the matter ; and there was a complacency in her bright eyes as they rested upon the two figures, who were bending over a pool some little way ahead. "I hope that you are not bored," she added, "or thinking yourself bound to collect these quaint bits of flowers, if you would rather be doing something else."

Of course Denis assured her of the contrary. He could do so quite truthfully, for if her communications had not been entirely agreeable to him, it certainly was not for want of interest ; and if he were not doing exactly what he would have chosen, it seemed next best to be keeping in sight of the tall, slender maiden, whose graceful

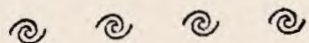
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head, black as a poppy's heart, drew his eyes onward, moving along before him, by the murmur of the stream.

As for his own companion, he liked her well, and found her gay and charming, when once she had fluttered out of the incongruous precincts of that shadow. Her spirits rose to blitheness as she mocked merrily at his awkward angling, and where the water lay shallow enough on the pretty glistening gravel, ran in and out of it, showing an undisguised pleasure like a child's, so instinct with enjoyment did she seem from the golden flicker of her hair to the white gleams of her dainty sandalled feet. It was perplexing to consider the relationship between this laughing girl and the stalwart young man, who appeared to be rather grave than otherwise as he walked on beside Elmède. To maintain this distance was, Denis believed, Avril's wish, not lost sight of through all her gaiety ; nor did the two couples join each other until they had come near the Swinging-Blossom Falls at the end of the glen.

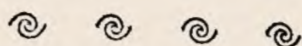
Here it narrowed, and sloped downwards



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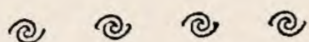
softly, so that in this reach the river was more rapid, running under a canopy upheld by huge trunks. Looking down the green vista of the alley, grove and stream were seen to be met by others, descending a steep hill-side, and just over their junction hung the snowy light of the Falls. At first Denis was puzzled to account for the strangeness of their aspect, which was unlike that of any cascades he had ever beheld ; but presently he perceived it to be caused by a great, wonderful creeper, drooping down the ravine in the bed of the river, and mingling itself with the falling water. Its foliage, exquisite as the lacy fronds of the maidenhair fern, wove a quivering web high up under the arch of the branches immediately above the leap of the stream, and its long, trailing tendrils flung themselves across and across from side to side of the rocky cleft in an intricate network. They were starred with round, cup-shaped blossoms of pure white veined with silvery green, capacious as an ogre's goblet, and the fashion in which they grew on their stalks was such that as each one swiftly filled with the

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showering spray, it tilted over, emptying its contents into a flower-cup beneath it, and swinging erect again. The motion thus continually kept up among a thousand over-brimming blossoms, as they dipped and rose, seemed to set itself against the motion of the ever-falling foam, and somehow had the effect of one pale mist climbing up through the dropped folds of another. It was all reflected below in the circle of a still pool, which it filled with a mock swirl and seething.

They reached this place late in the afternoon, when, on the golden hush that brooded over the high-roofed woods and flooded into their glades, the cool rustle of the cataract came refreshingly, and that shadowy recess with floating gleams of foam to light its dimness seemed very pleasant to loiter in for a while. Beside the pool they sorted their captured pitcherines, for which Elmède had brought a basket finely woven of some very fragrant woodbine-tinted grass. To Denis's regret he could offer her only three perfect blossoms for her collection, so unskilful had been his angling,



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in the course of which he had bent the silver top of his rod by wedging it between two boulders. He was a little surprised at the greatness of his pleasure when she declared one of his contributions, which had petals flecked with turquoise blue, to be a rare species, and a particular favourite of her own.

After a while Avril began to scramble about the foot of the steep slope in search of rock-roses, and Destran carried off Denis's rod to hammer it straight on a flat stone, so that Elmède and Denis were left to one another's company. Denis again felt rather inclined to wonder when he considered how precisely this was what he had been desiring all along.

Elmède sat on a mossy, shelving bank close to the edge of the stream where it issued from the pool, sliding with a strong, swift current, but smooth and quiet, for its channel lay clear. She had set her basket on a ledge beside her ; at her feet was a little crescent of milk-white sand, which had silted into a curve of the bank. Her dark head just touched the velvety verdure as

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she leaned on her left arm looking down sideways into her basket of flowers, and now and then taking out one for a nearer view. She said nothing for some minutes, and Denis was quite content to watch her silently from his seat on a great, low-growing bough, that crooked itself horizontally over the stream. To look at Elmède always made him think of music, not unnaturally, considering the circumstances in which he had seen her first ; yet it seemed to him that they were not solely or chiefly the reason. And with the thought of music woke a longing for that of the violin, which he had left locked up in his pleasant chamber at home—so in his own mind he had already begun to call the Lynmarches' house. But thereupon also stirred the remembrance of that stranger music, heard yesterday, and never to be forgotten, matched with which all the harmonies of the world he had heretofore known were as echoes faint and confused, jangled and broken.

Suddenly there came on him an intense desire to hear it once more, and as suddenly the

desire was rebuked, with a reproachful protest against it by an inward voice. What am I wishing for indeed? he demanded of himself. And immediately he fell to imagining how it would be if those mysterious sounds did now actually rise up around him, and then between him and the girl, now so near that he could almost touch her with his hand, there fell that moment of awful, impenetrable dimness, to be succeeded by a mute void for evermore. Mighty poets have recorded the swooping down of such fears, which arrive and depart like nimble-winged, ominous birds. Denis could not have put into words his sense of the dread that had overcome him like a summer cloud, but its hovering shadow so daunted and bewildered him that the air grew full of menaces. Hence, when Elmède by-and-by said softly, half to herself: "Listen to that," he sprang to his feet, and looked about him in nothing short of a panic.

"What do you hear?" he said; but as he spoke he saw that she was only intent on the river-water, which ran by gurgling in and out

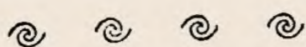
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of the bank's little hollows and creeks. Its sound, if one listened closely, seemed to be made up of Elfin bells chiming and hammers clinking through a murmurous monotone that enfolded them all. She had not noticed his startled manner, and replied : "Just this : don't you hear how it swells every now and then, as if a voice were trying to speak through it, and were caught and turned into a kind of music ?"

"There are always musical notes to be heard in running water," Denis said, sitting down on the bank, "and this sounds very pleasant, I think."

"So do I," said Elmède ; "but I sometimes almost wonder that our wise people don't take measures to silence the streams, or at least prevent anybody from coming within hearing of them." She spoke with a tinge of bitterness, and added deprecatingly : "I can talk to you about it, for I know that you have not any dread of music."

"Not I, indeed," said Denis. "It would be strange if I had, considering what life would look like to me without music."



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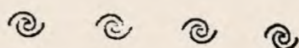
"And now," she said regretfully, "you are considering that by the light of sad experience."

"Oh, for that matter," he answered quickly, "I have often had to abstain from music for a much longer time. Besides——" He was about to say that the amazing beauty of what he had heard yesterday would be a possession for ever, well worth a far more serious privation; but doubting the prudence of doing so, he changed the remark into: "Besides that, it would be impossible for any moderately reasonable person to feel dissatisfied here, where there is really everything else that one could wish for."

"Then you are not quite moderately reasonable," she said, and so evidently expected no polite disclaimer that he made none. After a short pause she continued: "I very much want to hear your music again. Of course, as you know, it is against the law, and we should have to be careful, but it would not be hard to manage. Will you make it for me some day, Denis-Maine?"

Her way of pronouncing his name all in one word Denis liked inexplicably well, and her

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request pleased him even more, until a disturbing recollection flashed into his mind. He bethought him of the theories which Lynmarch had spoken about last night, and they puzzled his will. For how should he take part in an action which might conceivably bring a shadow of peril nearer to this would-be law-breaker's head? From this point of view consent seemed a thing forbidden; but on the other hand his strongest wishes ran counter to refusal. So he hesitated for a moment before he replied: "I'd like nothing in the world better than to play for you, if it could be done without risk."

"We could drive off a long way towards the shore," said Elmède, "where there would be practically none."

"I didn't mean risk of interruption," said Denis, "but that your brother has spoken to me of some things which make it seem as if there might be another far more serious danger."

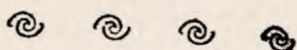
"Oh, I know," she said a little impatiently. "These scientific people are, in their own way, nearly as absurd as the ancient folk who used to

wear amulets, and repeat rhymes when the wind blew too loud. I dare say my brother has been explaining to you how they imagine that such sounds as you make on your instrument might send us away into the Unseen no less than the Music of the Mist."

"He did talk of that, and gave me some reasons, too, that I thought had some force," Denis said. "But I am more than ignorant."

"Ah, but there are reasons against them, and here is one," Elmède said, looking up at him with eager, dark eyes: "Never yet, in all the ages during which trials of the sort have been made, has any one come upon the faintest trace of a clue to this mystery, whereas in every other search the great truths have glimmered dimly far off, and have been half guessed long before they were brought fully to light. So that even if the discovery does lie in this direction, we may expect the first sign of it to be something intrinsically trivial, and not a sudden, large event. I do think it is because none of us consider the subject quite rationally that the apprehensions you speak of exist."

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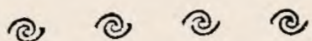


"I can well believe that you are perfectly right," said Denis.

"And indeed, Denis-Maine," she said earnestly, "my brother is mistaken in supposing, as I know he does, that only what lies beyond the Music draws me to it. That comes first, it is true. But I should long to hear the Music for the sake of its own beauty, if there were nothing else. And though I feel now that your music to the Music of the Mist may perhaps be no more than the spray-drops in one of those flower-cups to all the wild water leaping past them, yet it gave me such delight that I have ever since been wishing to hear it again."

"And surely you shall," said Denis. "May I run back and fetch my violin now? Isn't this place lonely enough?"

"That would never do," she said with emphasis. "You can't understand how shocked the others would be. But one of these days you shall take it, and we will go together to the shore, or at least a long way towards it, where, as you have seen, the country is deserted; and there you can



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play as much as you please in safety. Nor will it endanger our agreement not to question you, directly or indirectly, yet awhile about your own country or world, for I have noticed that you are very careful yourself to keep away from the subject. Still, as a further precaution, I should like you to promise that you will not tell me anything even if I forget and ask."

"Certainly I promise," Denis said, thinking how little inclination he would probably have to break his word. In fact he only just avoided betraying the reflection in his tone.

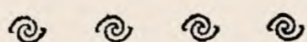
"I might be tempted," Elmède said, fixing her eyes steadily on her flower-basket as she spoke, "because I can't help having a great hope. And the reason of it is—I won't even look at you now, lest I should guess whether you think me right or wrong—the reason I am hopeful is that you have not only this marvellous gift for music and love of it, but that they are mingled with no instinctive dread of it ; you have to overcome no sort of shrinking aversion, such as we all have by nature, and perhaps never wholly lose. You, it is clear,

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can hardly realise the existence of such feelings about music ; and how could that be unless you had seen and known what is hidden from us ? So it seems to me that we may be on the brink of learning the one truth that our world has sought for in vain through all these ages. And I think the delight of seeing the darkness lift will be worth the long waiting and groping under its shadow."

"The darkness ?" Denis repeated. The exclamation escaped him involuntarily ; for as he sat amid the charm of this rare little chamber of the woods, "informed with ever moving light" and the breath of a most delicate air, while the river crooned a rippling burden to Elmède's clear voice, he had thought of nothing less than any gloom saddening the lot of those who dwelt in that strange land. Therefore he said "the darkness ?" with an emphasis that betrayed the moment's perplexity.

Elmède's eyes shone on him suddenly. "Why, you can't at all imagine it," she said, with a note of exultance in her tone—"the doubt, and the restlessness and impatience, and the fears that



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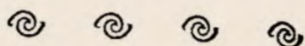
come to us. The fear of fear," she said, her voice dropping, "that they who are gone may have utterly ceased to be. No wonder you are amazed."

Denis listened with dismay. "This is irony with a vengeance," he said to himself. "She looks upon me as a kind of Shelleian skylark : *Waking or asleep, thou of death must deem things more true and deep.*—Heaven forbid that I should ever have to tell her any of my dreams, and show her the screech-owl by which she has really been visited."

"However, I must not speculate any more at present," Elinède said, "for it makes Avril unhappy, and I see her coming back." But though she quitted the subject, the radiance lingering in her look gave Denis a guilty sensation, innocent as he was of abetting her self-deceit.

Avril's spirits, on the contrary, seemed to have flagged a little, and there was just a trace of petulance in her manner towards Destran, who at that moment returned with the mended rod. "It was a pity," she said, "to spend your time

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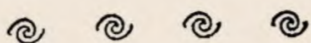
over that, when we shall not be angling any more to-day."

"Denis Maine seemed to consider that he had done irreparable damage," said Destran, "and I wanted to show him how easily it could be set to rights."

"I don't believe that he was overwhelmed with remorse," she said, "and you might have helped me to get some plants that I couldn't reach."

"These two were the wise ones perhaps," said Destran, "for they didn't trouble themselves to do anything; and Elmède, at any rate, looks as if she had enjoyed it."

Elmède, indeed, with an unwonted wild-rose flush and sparkling eyes, looked rather like a flower become alive, Denis thought. He thought also that Destran drew attention to it with a touch of pride, as if he were showing off something in which he could claim an especial interest. But Avril's countenance continued to be slightly aggrieved, and she now complained that she had met with a shower of falling clematis blossoms,



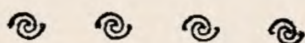
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which had strewed themselves over her, and were caught in her hair. She produced one, with a disgusted air, from a fold of her sleeve, and Destran undutifully expressed his opinion that she was just feeling about for something to grumble at, and added that he could not congratulate her upon her success. The little white petals did indeed but absurdly play the part of a scapegoat, which had been the object of her quest, and she looked half-ashamed of them as they fluttered away.

"She has brightened up, certainly, since the morning, and is looking wonderfully well. Of course it is the novelty," she said to Destran, in an aside, of which a breeze made Denis an overhearer.

On the way home Destran walked with Denis, and told him about their plans for the morrow, which would take them farther afield. Elmède and Avril went together, and seemed to be discussing the arrangements for a small children's party, with which they intended to occupy themselves during the absence of the men. Denis was struck by their manner of talking about this

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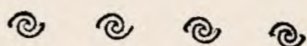


child and that with an amused delight, rather as he had heard people at home speak of some pet animal's intelligence or affection ; and then it occurred to him that here, where animals were not, grown-up persons must look to children for the kind of pleasure derived from the quaintness and simplicity of dogs and kittens and small birds. He wondered what effect this would have on the welfare of youth. Though all its possibilities might not be promising, it appeared, on the whole, likely to ensure a good time in childhood without entailing a worse time in maturer years. For these people, he said to himself, are not stupid enough to spoil children. His only youthful acquaintance so far had been the little honey-gathering girl, and she had made a favourable impression. But he was soon to form another, under less happy auspices.

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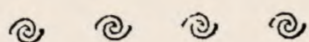
NEXT morning Denis, as had been arranged over-night, set off early with Lynmarch and Destran. They had about fifty miles to drive, and their destination was a place where some works on a large scale were in progress. Lynmarch told Denis that as he was himself to superintend operations for the day, he had so selected his colleagues that Denis would meet only a few people, who could be relied on to spread no indiscreet reports concerning a foreigner of singular antecedents. Denis had inquired about the nature of the work, but Lynmarch and Destran said that they would be better able to explain it on the spot. "We should like to get your unprejudiced opinion on the subject," Destran had said, "and in the circumstances you will be more likely to have one if you hear no particulars about the thing beforehand."

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After they had driven swiftly through the pleasant woodlands for nearly an hour, they came to the edge of an undulating, prairie-like plain, beyond which a low hill rimmed the horizon, and for that, Denis was told, they were making. Half-way across the plain, when the hill stood out clearly before them, Lynmarch pulled up. "Now, Maine," he said, "take a look at this view, and tell us what you think of it."

Denis looked critically at the landscape. Its most marked feature was this hill-range, which at each end sank rather abruptly into a belt of forest. The hill did not rise to more than four or five hundred feet in height, and was covered with greensward, through which rust-coloured, roundish stains of red sandstone here and there had worn their way. The outline of it was mean and purposeless, with absurd notches and lumps and horns that suggested a battered cocked hat. On a larger scale it might have had some deformed dignity; as it was, its unshapeliness vexed and wearied the eye as a harsh, meaningless sound does the ear.



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"To tell you the truth," Denis said, finding this effect grow upon him as he looked, "I think it is much the ugliest thing that I have seen since I came into your country."

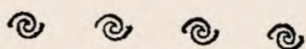
His answer evidently gratified both his companions. "I am glad of that," said Lynmarch, "and I quite agree with you myself. I'd be sorry to live where I saw it often, and my sister won't come this way at all. She says that it gives her bad dreams. It looks even worse from the other side."

"Your first sight of it will be your last, I hope," Destran said, "for we shall alter its contour considerably to-day, at any rate, if we don't finish the job completely."

"You must have rather a biggish job on hand then," said Denis.

"Oh, we intend just to blow the whole top off the ridge and bring it down all along to about a level with those woods to left and right," said Lynmarch, "and as we are trying a new system of mines, invented by a man who is first-rate at this sort of engineering, we expect

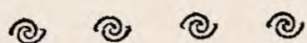
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to get it all done in a piece. The spectacle ought to be quite imposing, and though the place will, of course, look very unsightly for a while, it will be vastly improved before long, when the surface is all covered with timber. You see what a growth of that there is already at each end, where we treated part of the ridge in the same way a few years ago."

"But that was a far smaller piece of work, it being so much lower originally," said Destran. "What I am doubtful about is whether the immense force we are using this time mayn't scatter the débris about too widely, and give more trouble in the long run than if we had a succession of minor blasts. What do you think, Maine? Perhaps you have seen this kind of thing done."

"I can't say that I have," said Denis. "I have never seen a hill improved off the face of the earth." He had in his mind, as he spoke, the recollection of more than one fair hill that he had beheld in process of demolition by the pecking and nibbling of quarrymen and miners,



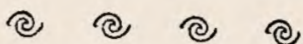
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with occasional accelerating crashes. Hence he passed, naturally enough, to reminiscences of sundry industrial centres, where the world seems to have become a smouldering cinder-heap, foul and murky, and he felt all the worse qualified to offer advice on the subject of extensive landscape gardening.

"Very probably," said Lynmarch, as they started again, "you have no such eyesores to remove."

A few minutes more brought them to the foot of the hill, where they found a group of men waiting for them. These people appeared all to be of the same class as Lynmarch and Destran, and much about the same age, except one small boy, for whose presence his father apologised, saying that he had set his heart on a sight of the preparations. The lad, who had a capacious forehead and very solemn eyes, looked graver and more sedate than any of the party, and was so deeply absorbed in the contemplation of some apparatus that he only half attended to Lynmarch's greeting. Lynmarch said that

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they were very glad to see him, but added significantly : " We mustn't have any of your own experiments to-day, you know. They might result in something more serious than that start-ling geyser at Aspenrock."

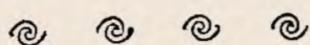
" I wish," the boy said reflectively, " that you had waited for a bit. My apparatus is going to be ever so much better than this old thing—far finer and simpler. Here's part of it."

He took out of his pocket, and lovingly surveyed, what looked like a small silver nut, seen through a filmy coil of the thinnest wire.

Lynmarch took it from him and examined it, handling it with caution, while the owner watched him like the mistrustful parent of a kitten.

" I'll tell you what, Lynmarch," said Destran, " somebody had better keep an eye on this young man, for unfinished inventions are sometimes unpleasantly complete in their effects."

" He can come along with us, and we'll leave this behind us safely," said Lynmarch. " Have you brought any more machinery with you, Nordaret ?"

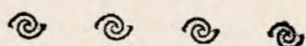


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“No,” said Nordaret, gazing wistfully at his little wiry web. “If I could have got that charged now, we might have tried how it would work,” he said. But Lynmarch stowed it away in one of the dug-out shelters from which they were to view the blast, and they all went up the hill to make some final observations.

From the ungraceful ridge they looked towards far lovelier ranges, across a land where the ethereal blue of many a mere was set among the deep woods, and through the meadows strayed many a bright river. Several spurs and buttresses of the hill had to be inspected by the engineering experts, and the small party broke up for this purpose, scattering in different directions. Lynmarch and Denis walked along the ridge to its north end, which rose into a sudden little peak. Climbing it, they descended a few feet on the other side to a swarded platform, which topped a sheer precipice of bare red sandstone. At its foot lay a narrow ravine, the opposite bank of which, lower and less steep, was pillared with a procession of forest trees. Standing on this

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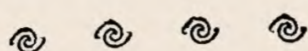


platform, they looked up the long colonnades of silvery grey stems, and on into the cool, green depths of the wood. "There's just such another plantation behind us, you know," Lynmarch said; "they'll meet now in the space I'm going to clear for them."

As he spoke he glanced round, and a moment afterwards exclaimed: "I declare, we have let that boy escape." He pointed to a small figure running swiftly down a slope; it was undoubtedly Nordaret.

"Well," said Lynmarch, "I should have kept a sharper look-out. However, those two fellows below there won't let him play any tricks, I think, and we shall all be going down presently. Let us get round this way, and see whether the others are ready."

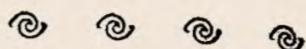
They set off walking along the edge of the red cliff, with at first the peak and then a swelling knoll a little way above them on their right. The short grass under their feet was all thick with exceedingly small, blue flowers, the filmy petals of which might have been wrought from



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flakes of frosted sapphire. Denis picked up one of them, and was thinking idly how many myriads of these, and how much fine workmanship, were doomed to speedy destruction, when an enormous rushing roar seemed in an instant to envelope them, and with it came an earthquake that seemed to swing the whole frame of things dizzily to and fro. A moment more, and the rocky peak above them began to nod like an uncouth, drowsy head, while detached lumps of stone came rolling and bounding down in all directions, sending up resilient showers of splinters from the places where they fell. A cloud of blinding dust thickened the air. Through this din and dimness Denis heard Lynmarch's voice close by observing that "something must have gone a bit wrong," and the phrase struck him as inadequately descriptive of the situation.

The turmoil, however, subsided almost as quickly as it had arisen. That deafening roar appeared as if it had flung itself against a stark wall of silence and dropped dead. Stray stones, tumbling here and there, made only insignificant



clatters, and the dust began to clear away. Presently there was a sound of approaching shouts, which betokened that the rest of the party were hurrying in their direction, and seeking to ascertain their safety. One man, who had outstripped the others, appeared on the precipice-skirting path, and ran towards them. "This is our surgeon," Lynmarch said to Denis. "Doesn't he look inhumanly disappointed at finding that he hasn't been provided with a patient?"

The only response to his question was startling and irrelevant, for he had scarcely spoken when the topmost boulder of the peak beneath which they were standing dashed itself down beside them, scattering fragments far and wide as it flew into pieces, and one of these struck Lynmarch full in the face with fearful violence, hurling him to the ground.

"Is he dead?" Denis inquired, standing by the surgeon, who was examining the injured man.

The surgeon looked up, puzzled, but lacking leisure for explanations. "Stunned, you mean, I suppose," he said. "Fortunately he is completely ;

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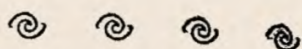
but it is as I feared—his eyes are utterly destroyed. It came right across them."

"Good God!" said Denis, and stared round on the sunshine with a sort of despairing horror, as if the black depths beyond it had become actually visible to him. Had he not indeed just seen them engulf a fellow-creature, doomed to them for ever?

This benumbed feeling remained with him all through the busy time that followed, while Lynmarch was being carried down the hill, and steps were taken to guard, if possible, against other untimely explosions. The calamity weighed upon Denis with its hopeless irremediableness, which made all attempts to mend and mitigate appear somewhat worse than vain. Could Lynmarch wish, indeed, to have the curse of a ruined life thrust back on him by misapplied skill? Would he not, if free to choose, have declined its ministrations, and have bidden his friends refrain from awakening him to a dawnless night?

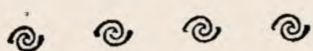
At the foot of the hill they were met by the two engineers who had stayed behind. With

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them was young Nordaret, by whose excess of scientific zeal the accident, it appeared, had been brought about. He had been caught in the act of meddling with the electrical apparatus, and had admitted that his desire to test his own little instrument had irresistibly tempted him to aim what he called "a burrowing ray" at the peak, which he supposed unoccupied. Pride in the unexpectedly formidable powers of his invention had clearly not been altogether banished from his mind by the untoward consequences of his experiment and the reproaches that were freely bestowed upon him. When Denis's party fell in with him, he was vehemently protesting against the confiscation of his dangerous toy, and his failure to recover it evidently diverted him from a becomingly penitent consideration of the grievous harm he had done. The tidings of Lynmarch's fate did now shock him, it is true ; but he seemed by no means to grasp the magnitude of the calamity. "Of course he could not realise it," Denis said to himself ; "nor can any of us, for that matter."

And then for the first time came to him the

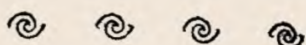


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thought that Elmède must hear the news. His stay with the Lynmarches had shown him how much brother and sister were to one another, so that he could not but forecast a sorrowful overshadowing of all Elmède's days to come. Before his inward eye came a sudden, vivid picture of her as she might be even then, playing with the children, in her beautiful pleasance, where the sun would never again shine for her with the fairness it had still this day. It seemed to him that he actually saw the clear, golden light dimmed and blurred about those lawns and alleys.

While he was reflecting thus, Destran, who had been with the surgeon and two or three others in the tent whither they had brought Lynmarch, came up and said : " We want you to do us a service, Maine. Elmède Lynmarch, you know, must hear of this without delay ; and you can best be spared to go and tell her, for you see some of us will have to stay here on account of the mines, and the rest of us will be wanted to help in bringing Lynmarch home slowly in the car we shall fit up as an ambulance. If you go on ahead

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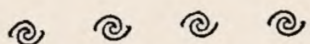


in one of these small cars, you will get back long before us, and give her and my mother time to prepare for our arrival."

Some days afterwards it came to Denis's knowledge that the chief reason of this request was a probability of further dangerous explosions, which made these people anxious to get their guest quickly out of harm's way. At this time, however, he suspected nothing of the sort, and of course undertook the commission. Very loth he was to do so. His task naturally seemed to him a terrible one, and while he apprehended, on Elmède's account, his clumsy execution of it, he more selfishly foreboded on his own behalf that his would be a losing office. "Tell her," was Destran's parting injunction, "that he has been under an anæsthetic ever since the accident, so she needn't fear that he is suffering at all. He will not be conscious again until he is safely at home."

"And what a waking that will be ! Heaven help him." Denis said to himself, setting forth dejectedly on his errand.

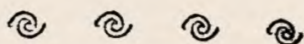
He was sorely cast down by the misfortune.



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Lynmarch, with whom he was better acquainted than with any other inhabitant of this strange country, had shown him so much kindness, and Denis had found him so eminently likeable, that they were already on at least the high road, also, seemingly, a short cut, to friendship. Moreover, the fairness of those fortunes naturally deepened the blackness of the shadow that had fallen on them. As Denis steered himself rapidly along beneath fretted, golden-green canopies and over blossom-powdered lawns and by the clearness of waters, he looked on them all with the remembrance in his thought of the darkened eyes that would behold them no more. Then he recalled Lynmarch's keen delight in books and pictures, and his many eager activities of body and mind, all snatched away from him for ever. And with a degree of regretful commiseration, that to most people perhaps would have seemed excessive, he bethought him of the one great solace from which Lynmarch was debarred. His blank hours would be unsoothed, uncharmed by music until the very last of them had come. "Surely he will be one of those who listen for it,

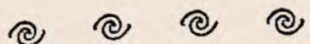
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and think it long on the way," Denis said to himself ; and the reflection, as it called up reminiscences of their first meeting, brought him back to the thought of Elmède, and of his fears that he had since then set her hoping falsely, and his certainty that he must now set her only too truly grieving.

The nearer he came to his journey's end, the harder he found it to refrain from slackening his pace, and foolishly putting off the evil moment. But he kept on steadily and swiftly, and was soon among the more familiar meads and groves, with by-and-by a glimpse of the house's white columns gleaming down a forest road. At the entrance of the pleached alley he stopped, and left the car, having a presentiment that he would find Elmède in the pleasure beyond.

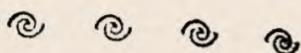
He was not mistaken, for after wandering a while through a series of long-shaped, oval plots, enclosed with soft grey-greenery, and paven with single-hued sheets of vivid blossom, successively scarlet, white, azure, orange, and violet, like links in an enamelled chain, he came to the crystal



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pendant, in the shape of a circle, filled by a moteless pool. Fleecy bushes of flowering thorns surrounded it, standing raised above a wide, shallow step of mossy turf that made its rim ; and on this Elmède and two small children were sitting. The three dark heads, very close together in a cluster, bent over the bright, still water, were the only shadow-fleck in the brimming mirror, with its reflections all blue air and snow-drift cloud. Floating close to the edge was the object of their interest—a miniature iceberg wrought into the model of a many-storeyed house, with rows of windows and pillars and balconies and towers and gables. It was gradually melting away before their pleased eyes ; cascades leaped from all its doors, and every now and then some glittering fragment fell with a rippling splash, whereat the children shouted exultant. “ Elmède, Elmède,” one of them was saying just as Denis came within earshot, “ would it be fair to throw a tiny, very little stone at the pillar there that keeps sticking up, and help it to tumble ? ” And Elmède answered : “ Oh, we’d better have patience, and let it come

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down of itself." Upon which the other small child commented gravely : " I think I wish there wasn't any patience, for then people couldn't have it when they want to do things."

* * * * *

IT was at this moment that Elmède, looking up, saw Denis, where he stood irresolute close by ; she rose immediately and went towards him. He was not sorry to perceive that she already foreboded something amiss ; her eyes, as they met his, were full of terror. “ An accident to your brother—they are bringing him home,” he said, feeling that the words contained possibilities dreadful enough to justify any alarm. But almost to his dismay an expression of infinite relief came into her face, and she said with a long sigh : “ Oh, I am thankful indeed if it’s nothing worse than that.”

“ It’s a very serious accident, I fear,” he hastened to add, lest she should be reassured only to receive another shock. “ His eyes are terribly injured ; in fact, the doctor seems to have little or no hope of saving his sight.”

At this her countenance fell again ; still the terror did not return. “ Ah, poor boy,” she said,

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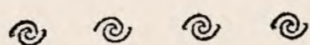
“what a trouble and disappointment for him, when he was just finishing his book, and had planned so much other work. They will be in despair about it, you know.”

Denis, feeling strongly that these lesser regrets would be speedily swallowed up in the shadow of the calamity as its vastness loomed on her, kept silence for lack of anything consolatory to say.

“And now to be cut off from it all, and shut out from all these things,” she said, looking about her sorrowfully. Then starting as if with a pang of recollection : “I’m afraid he must be suffering greatly, too, all this while. They won’t have been able to do much for him there, without any remedies to hand.”

“Oh, they were well provided,” Denis said. “Destran sent you word that they were keeping him under anæsthetics.”

“That’s a comfort, at any rate,” she said, looking cheered. “Well, we must just make up our minds to have patience. Yet we shall always be grudging such a large piece lost out of



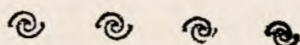
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his life—out of *our* lives, to some extent, for of course we shall miss him at every turn.”

Denis listened with an unhappy sort of puzzled surprise. Something in her words and manner, regretful though they were, seemed to him incongruous, for she was evidently looking on into the future, and that she could contemplate so steadily the prospect of all these ruined years to come struck him strangely enough ; he could only suppose that she had not yet really grasped the truth.

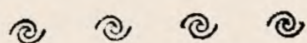
“ Some people would almost consider,” he said unawares, thinking aloud, “ that a life so marred were better ended outright.”

Elméde’s startled exclamation showed him that he had blundered ; but before he could devise any mode of softening down his speech, he saw that she had interpreted it after a fashion of her own, and in accordance with theories which he had himself unwittingly led her to adopt. “ Ah, but then you have the knowledge that is hidden from us,” she said. “ In our ignorance and doubt we learn to content ourselves with much that you



perhaps can hardly imagine as tolerable at all, and for reasons that you, of course, have had no experiences to explain to you. And I am not sure that this is wholly loss to us ; there may be compensations, as I hope that my brother will find, in spite of the disappointment and overthrow of his plans. But now I must tell Avril, and get things ready indoors. Children dear, I can't wait to watch the iceberg any longer. I wonder, Denis-Maine, whether you would mind staying here with them for a few minutes ? I know they wouldn't like to come away before the end of it."

Denis willingly accepted the charge of them, by no means loth to divert his melancholy reflections with their talk, which was charming and droll, and their gleeful excitement, which culminated when the remnant of the melting block heeled over and sank, revealing and leaving afloat behind it a wonderful little model canoe, with paddles and sail and carven figurehead. He could not, however, banish the thought of that mournful procession then on its way thither. The children



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had more than once to rouse him urgently from his reveries, in which was included an impression that he must have bungled over his message and failed to prepare Elmède for what lay before her.

Later on that day he expressed something of this feeling to Destran, while they sat in the veranda fronting the river, and watched the moon swim in an out of sight among tangled branches as she rose. Destran had apologised to him for giving him the unlucky office of bringing bad news. "I'm half afraid," said Denis, "that I didn't make clear to her the extent of the disaster at all adequately. She didn't seem to realise it."

"How so?" said Destran.

"It struck me," said Denis, "that she was considering merely more or less trifling inconveniences—the alteration in his plans for the immediate future, and so on. She spoke, for instance, of the delay to his forthcoming work, as if that were the most serious part of the matter."

"Well, but isn't it in fact?" said Destran. "It's the only part, certainly, that will affect any very large number of people."

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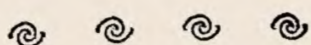
"I fear I'm not public-spirited enough to weigh that consideration against blindness," said Denis.

"After all," said Destran, "a few months, even in the dark, are not so very long passing."

"A few months?" Denis repeated. "Didn't your surgeon say that his eyes were completely destroyed? Indeed, I know they must be so," he said, with a shudder at the remembrance. Then, as he became aware that his companion was looking at him perplexedly, he added, after a pause: "I believe that we are talking at cross purposes."

"Destroyed they are, undoubtedly," said Destran, "but in three or four months they will be completely restored. I suppose the fact is that such accidents are impossible amongst you. Here they are extremely rare, but have happened often enough to give us an ample number of cases for observation."

"No, the fact is quite different," said Denis; "but I wish you would tell me what does happen in a case of the kind here."



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"Why, it's very simple," said Destran. "We find it better for the patient to stay quietly in a darkened room until the injured eyes have repaired themselves. The process is more rapid when he does so, and it is always complete within a week, on one side or the other, of the hundredth day. But in any case his recovery can't be much longer delayed."

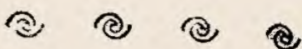
"And then he sees again as well as ever?" said Denis.

"Of course, just as well," said Destran.

"And before that, he has found his sight come gradually glimmering back?" said Denis.

"Not at all," said Destran. "He can have no sight until the communication between the brain and optic nerve is restored, and that occurs quite suddenly at the end of the time I have mentioned. Some people declare that they have found the moment delightful enough to make more than amends for their spell in the dark. I can almost imagine it myself, and I know that Elmède gets much consolation from the idea. But no doubt all this is different in your country. How

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long would a man, in such circumstances, remain blind there ? ”

“ To the end of his days,” said Denis.

“ What do you mean ? ” Destran asked.

“ I mean that he would never see again,” Denis replied.

Destran gazed at him aghast, and at length said breathlessly, as if he had been taking a deep draught of new and heart-chilling horror : “ Then if your eyes were hurt, you would be without sight for ever ? ”

“ Certainly,” said Denis ; “ if they are once destroyed, by accident or disease, sight is irrevocably gone—no earthly power can restore it.”

On this reply Destran pondered for a while in silence. “ I must say it passes my understanding,” he said slowly, “ how you, or anybody, can exist on the edge of such an abyss.”

“ Custom makes heroes of us all,” said Denis. “ No doubt if you come to consider it as a novelty, it does seem rather appalling to know that you are living in a world where a million hopelessly blind people wake up every morning, and where,



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before the sun goes down, you may be sharing there fate. But it is really just one of the many things that we must not consider too deeply. That is the practical view of the matter. For though we can, and do, bear in mind the power we have of taking our departure, it's a dismal sort of venture, setting out from darkness to darkness, and nearly all of them wait till they are called for."

"There again," said Destran, "you speak of something quite apart from any experience of mine, and more incomprehensible than the perpetual blindness—which is indeed a notion that shapes itself only too clearly in the mind."

"As I said, it's a sorry kind of panacea ; still it's the only one we possess," said Denis. "But am I to understand that with you every sort of bodily affliction is curable as well as blindness ? Is there always hope of recovery ?"

"Not so much hope as certainty," said Destran ; "it's all a matter of time and patience or impatience, as the case may be ; the result is the same. The

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sole possible prevention of the cure is a summons before its completion—the coming of the Mist. That has been known to intervene ; but, as you may suppose, such an event is extremely rare."

"I am very curious to know," said Denis, "how it is when not merely a limb is lost, but when the injury involves some vital part of the body. What would have happened, for instance, to-day, if Lynmarch had had his head swept off, or had been blown into fragments ?"

Before Destran answered he appeared to reflect for a while upon a proposition the terms of which he had considerable difficulty in grasping. Then he replied : "I can't attempt to say what would happen in circumstances which are so utterly without precedent, and the occurrence of which is hardly even conceivable. You see, Maine, your question shows that you must be acquainted with a condition of things fundamentally unlike ours. No mutilations such as you speak of could by any possibility befall any living being, so far as our

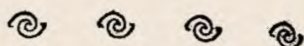


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knowledge goes. A body may be crushed, shattered, thrown out of working order, like a machine, but no amount of force or of skill could tear or take it asunder, like a machine, or reduce any part of it to a state from which it will not naturally return to its normal condition. Absolutely nothing can bring about its disintegration except the influence, whatever that may be, which comes with the Music of the Mist."

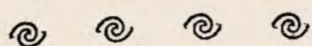
Upon receiving this statement Denis, in his turn, meditated for some time before he spoke again. He was thinking with concern that he had talked with an ill-timed indiscreetness. No doubt the perturbing events of that day had helped to make both Destran and himself forget their agreement about prohibited subjects ; but Denis now felt that the facts which he had thus been led to communicate were likely, just at present, to have a peculiarly depressing effect on those who heard of them for the first time, as Destran clearly had done. The undisguised amazement and consternation with which he had listened gave very sufficient proof of that. Denis's own uneasiness grew as he

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saw that his unlucky communications were being pondered over with apparently increasing gloom. He would fain have said something to efface their impression, but nothing would occur that combined cheerfulness with veracity ; and he was not disposed to mend matters by substituting fraudulent misrepresentations for over-frankness. Destran's ignorance could not be restored. Failing that, what seemed most to be desired was that his unhappy knowledge should go no farther ; and with a view to this Denis broke the silence by saying : " It would have been better if I had said nothing about these puzzling differences yet ; and you may depend upon it that I will not mention them to Lynmarch or anybody else."

The hint was not lost on Destran, or, it seemed, needed by him, for he responded vehemently : " Assuredly not. They should on no account hear of such things ; it would be most unfortunate if they did so. We can't keep the horror too strictly to ourselves." Then, as if becoming conscious of how strongly he had expressed himself, he added less emphatically : " In any case I believe it will



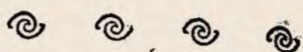
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be advisable to avoid the whole subject until we can talk it all over and go into it thoroughly, which is out of the question just now. We shall only confuse ourselves with imperfectly understood details. It's likely enough that I have got a quite wrong idea of what you really meant to tell me."

To this Denis assented ; but he saw that the probability was not sufficient to restore Destran's peace of mind.

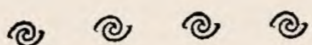
When they soon afterwards joined Avril indoors, she ascribed his flagging spirits to concern about Lynmarch, and told Denis aside that the delay in the completion of their friend's work caused much disappointment to her son, who was jealous on behalf of his father's reputation, and anxious lest the discovery should be forestalled. Quite plausible, Denis thought ; but his conscience reminded him that if Avril had overheard their recent conversation, she would have admitted more than one reason for Destran's dejected air. On the other hand Elmède, who came in by-and-by, was still wearing the look of undefinable hopeful-

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ness which he had seen spring into her eyes at his words, so strangely misconstrued. Though he could honestly acquit himself of having had any wish to delude her, or unduly to enlighten Destran, he could not doubt that he actually had done both, a conviction which haunted him all through the evening with a guilty sense of playing, however much against his will, a sort of serpent part in this confidingly hospitable Paradise.

Elmède's wish to hear his violin again had revived his hope of being able to render his hosts and their nation a great, a priceless service—nothing meaner than that of opening for them free access to music's Elysian fields, whence they had been so long debarred by the spectre of a fear. And he now specialised this hope into the less ambitious one that he might thus beguile some of Lynmarch's tedious hours. But it was quenched once more very quickly; for on the day after her brother's accident, Elmède, finding Denis alone in the library, reminded him of what she had said by the river about her wish that he would play for her, and about going with his violin to the shore.



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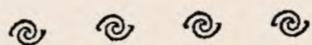
“I wish it still,” she said, “but I mustn’t think of doing it now. You see my brother will want me, and even if I could leave him, I know that in his heart he disapproves of my interest in music, and we might seem to be taking advantage of his absence rather unfairly and unkindly. If things were as usual, I shouldn’t mind contriving a little, and devising pretexts for an expedition ; but now when we could so easily set off without his knowledge—we needn’t so much as hide your curious violin—there would be a sadness in it. And besides that,” she added, “do you know, Denis-Maine, I almost think that in any case I would wait now for the time, which is not far off, when you will be able to answer all our questions. That what you tell us will bring us a great light I hardly doubt any longer, and such a prospect makes it seem a pity to go on trying for glimpses through chinks and crevices. Perhaps they might only perplex me, and lessen the happiness of looking forward to a clear sight. So I will not go with you ; and when I find myself wishing for that lovely air you played beside the lake, I will consider what

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wonderful hopes have sprung up since I heard it, and I should be ungrateful indeed if the result is anything worse than a very delightful sort of impatience."

In this decision Denis had, of course, to acquiesce, nor could he see how to avoid the appearance of acquiescing likewise in all the arguments by which Elmède had explained and recommended it. He had, in truth, scarcely the heart to wish her dream away, when he beheld the delicate glow into which its blissful wings had fanned her beauty. The chagrin with which he viewed her change of mind showed him plainly that she had begun to occupy a large space in his thoughts. His peculiar circumstances, however, went far to account for this, while his constant sense of being, compared with her, something very like a barbarian, helped further to disguise from him the fact—if fact it were—that he was falling in love.

But during the next few days he saw her only seldom, as she spent much of her time with Lynmarch; and this made him all the more desire

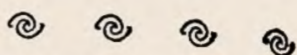


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the solace of his music. Destran, who had not entirely recovered his spirits, was summoned to a conference of engineers, which occupied him most of the day, so that Denis found himself left to his own devices more than had happened since his emergence from solitude. To plunge into it again for a while, with the companionship of his beloved Strad., was a wish that now grew upon him, strengthening from hour to hour, and he saw nothing to hinder its fulfilment. He felt bound, however, to speak of it to Destran, who diplomatically advised him to carry out his plans without saying anything definite about them, and added that if Denis did not return in a day or two, he would himself come to look up their guest. "Perhaps I ought not to sanction your wanderings," he said, "but you can't well lose yourself, and I'm quite sure that you don't wish to give us the slip."

Denis averred with perfect sincerity that nothing was further from his thoughts. Everybody seemed to take it for granted that he would now make his abode there, at any rate until Lynmarch had

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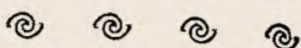


recovered. He could not but marvel at the rapidity with which he had come to consider himself, and to find himself considered, at home in this household of strangers.

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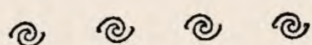
ON a crystalline early morning, fragrant with dew, he set off in the swift-running car which was at his disposal, and made his way through the woodlands to the Flower-lighted Lake. It was hard for him to imagine that scarcely a week had passed since he had first seen the place, for this cheverel glove of Time had so stretched itself as to include half a life's share of fateful experiences and strange emotions. As he halted beside the lake, he felt the craving to give these musical utterance grow on him irresistibly ; yet though nobody was in sight, the remembrance of his former interruption warned him that it would be prudent to go farther afield, and he started again, without delay. The rivers whereby he had guided himself so long made it an easy matter to retrace his steps. Here and there he passed one of the small cairns which

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he had piled up in the course of his lonely tramp, and which he now beheld with a vivid consciousness that a very much altered man was contemplating his own unchanged handiwork.

Not until he reached the seaward end of the long, mountain-girdling, stream-threaded glen, which had been almost the last stage of his journey up-country, did he feel that he was surrounded by a really secure solitude. Among the roots of a huge towering tree he chose a seat, and he opened his violin-case with an eagerness which was due partly to his longing for the music itself, and partly to a hope that he would lose in it the recollection of some harassing perplexities. He had for the time being forgotten how the first music he had made himself after his arrival in this strange land had dispelled the joyless apathy that was stealing over him by rousing him to a keen sense of his extreme loneliness, linked with a hope most vague and visionary that his journey might yet end it. Now his plight was indeed no longer so forlornly solitary. He could not with truth have denied

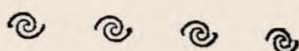


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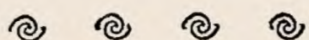
that he had found friends who gave a charm and interest to his life such as, in some degree, it had always lacked before. But he could quite truthfully say, that these did not fill up the place of the people whom he had been missing ; of whom, in all reason's despite, he had loved to imagine himself in quest, and who now, as he played, came back to him in more and more poignant memories. Perhaps it was not to be wondered at, that they seemed to bring with them reproaches of fickleness and disloyalty, yet were these reproaches wholly unmerited. Never for a day or an hour had the Dead lacked a share in his thoughts ; never had he felt it endurable to contemplate a destiny in which their paths and his should lie for evermore apart. Proof that this should not be was the master-hope with which he regarded "all that was new and all that was strange" in his present surroundings.

Still he was conscious of a certain change in his feelings about the comrades of his life in the old, far-off, heart-haunting home. He thought

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of them as one escaped from misery into a happier state might think of those whom he had left behind, toiling and grieving. His knowledge that they were no longer on earth he did not realise, and he over-realised his knowledge that their lines had never fallen in the pleasant places whither he had come. And this made him grudge his own kindlier experiences. As he sat breathing the delicious air of a forest state-^{li}er than any ancient temple, and more richly adorned than the holiest shrine on its highest festival, yet as wild withal as a wanderer's heart could desire, he looked back into the little suburban villa, cramped and commonplace without and within, where, to him and his, had come many a day of which dullness was by far the least questionable quality. Skies that scowled and bleak winds that blighted and perished were often only an appropriate setting for ills of body or mind which would have been mocked by the summer's brilliance and the spring's bourgeoning. Often enough they had been so mocked. Denis retained sharply outlined recollections of endless,

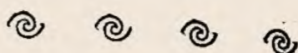


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blue-vaulted, empty days, when it had seemed as if the sun would never finish his course, and of others filled with the stir and bustle of nature waking up, oblivious of those who for private reasons were but aggrieved spectators. He remembered, even, how the noises and dusty mal-odours of an adjacent thoroughfare, much frequented by business vans and holiday makers, had been an abiding feature, the odiousness of which he had scarcely appreciated, he thought to himself now, as he looked out from under the boughs' shadow into the softly lighted green and silent glades. And nevertheless to what thousands of poor folk that unlovely plot might well appear a very garden of Eden. Would it not grow for himself an Eden above all Edens if it held again one of those by whom it had been deserted? Then he played his Dream in Sleep air, and said to himself, again, that at least they had had their music.

These memories and reflections, called up by the wand of his potent art, turned his thoughts homewards, and naturally led him to re-traverse

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the ways by which he had journeyed thence. Doing so, he came in due course to the mysterious barrier, through which he had found an entrance, amid such extraordinary circumstances. And thereupon he suddenly recalled an incident which had for some time past slipped out of his mind, rather unaccountably, seeing that in view of what had since then come to his knowledge it seemed to be of no small significance. This was the strange brightening of the murky cliff-wall, and the opening of a cleft through it, which had occurred while he played. It might, indeed, have been merely a coincidence—that was a point which only experiment could determine, and towards experiment his thoughts forthwith began to set. He remembered, with some surprise at the tardiness of the recollection, that on his power of passing the barrier cliff hinged his power of departing from this strange land. Departure was, it is true, the last thing he at that time desired ; still, to ascertain whether or no it lay at his choice appeared for several reasons highly expedient. To begin with, there was

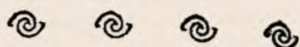


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everybody's instinctive demand to keep the key of his own door, a claim which, if he fail to enforce, the proportions of the most spacious room are apt to dwindle stiflingly. Then it was clear that circumstances might actually change his wishes about remaining—clear, that is, to his reason, for his feelings protested that wherever Elmède Lynmarch might be, there, betide what should betide, would he vehemently desire to find himself.

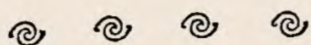
At the moment when just these considerations occurred to him Denis was resting, after a long forenoon's drive, followed by an hour's fiddling, beneath the great tree's cool weft of shade, in a place where the sound of waters falling and flowing made the air all one murmurous croon. Consequently the chances are that he was not very wide awake, and he at any rate afterwards held drowsiness responsible for the fancy that flitted through his mind as a possible crisis wherein his wish to quit this strange country and his wish to be with Elmède would coalesce. A vision rose before him of a car speeding away through these

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very woodlands bearing two fugitives from a household grown hostile, of a sound of pursuit gaining on them as they reached the silver-rimmed strand, of a hasty embarking and a swift flight, hard-pressed across the tranquil sea towards the mystery of its dark boundary wall, of a secret passage revealing itself in response to a melody's summons, and closing against baffled pursuers, who knew not the spell, and at last of finding himself on the other side alone with none else than Elmède—Elmède who had left kin and home and country to face with him a new and unknown world. Denis's drowsiness abruptly fled from him. "And what a world," he said; "good Heavens! what a world to imagine her inhabiting, even in a dream." A sense of having almost committed sacrilege ended his young-Lochinvar romance, and he proceeded to consider the subject from a more practical point of view.

The first plan that suggested itself to him was that he should make his way as far as the shore, endeavour to find his canoe, and, if successful, voyage out in search of the cliff-wall. This

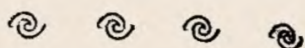


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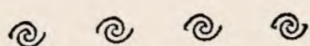
course seemed to have about it a laudable simplicity and promptitude, in which he was conscious that his actions were often deficient, he being somewhat prone to dawdle and procrastinate. But worthier propensities than these made him doubtful, upon consideration, as to the propriety of taking the step. It might be unfair, he thought, to his hosts. Destran had, it is true, at least tacitly consented to his violin-playing; but Denis felt that its application to this special purpose, fraught, perhaps, with most fateful consequences, had not been foreseen, and that he was possibly not justified in making it unauthorised. Yet, he argued, the question concerned him more intimately, its answer would effect him more vitally, than it could any other dweller in the land; and further, it seemed, necessarily, by no means certain that his enterprise would not be prohibited altogether if permission were sought—a risk he was loth to run.

On the whole he made up his mind that he was justified in seizing the present opportunity, and that his omission to consult his friends would

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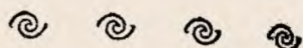
be to their advantage, leaving them uninvolved in any difficulties which might spring from his unlawful acts. Had not Destran himself suggested some such Pompeian policy? Denis resolved, therefore, to make at once for the seashore, whither he hoped that his swift car would convey him by nightfall. He would sleep within sound of the waves, and when light returned would try to find his canoe. A vivid mind-picture of the place where he had bestowed her seemed to promise him success; but Lynmarch's statement about the usually long distance of the cliff-wall from the land made Denis fear that he might be unable to reach it in a boat too small for any store of provisions. The mention, again, of outlook stations, and of a watch kept to seaward, prepared him for the possibility of being intercepted; however, his own unobserved arrival was an experience that augured well for his chances of escaping notice. Having formed this design, he carefully put up his violin, hastily gathered himself a bunch of grapes, and set off on a further stage of his journey.



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As he went he wondered whether, if he found the barrier impassable, he would regret that he had ever come through it. After but a short debate he finally answered no ; yet it was not an easy no to reconcile with his conscience, which there-upon accused him of renouncing his interest in the destinies of the sorrowing, laughing, struggling, grotesquely heroic, divinely deformed old world, where he and his had received their share of life, and had been brought together for a while. Against this charge he urged in defence how, he and they having been put asunder by that world's dire and ruthless law, his debt on account of the meeting was more than cancelled, so that he might choose unblamed a lot in any other sphere which offered him, were it even only escape from precincts now haunted by wraiths of a desolate home. Here, indeed, he had found much more than this—infinitely more, for he had learned many things which seemed to kindle a glimmer of hope beyond what had been ever most blank and rayless horizons. But he admitted that the glimmer waxed and waned according as he lost sight of, or recalled to

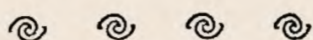
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mind, the conditions of existence as he had known them before he reached this strange land.

As he drew near the shore he was diverted from speculations of this kind by the need of keeping a sharp look-out for traces of his former leisurely journey. It was very important that he should strike the strand as near as possible to the place where he had landed and left his boat, and he grew somewhat mistrustful about the accuracy of his recollections. In fact, he did select a wrong thread from a tangle of rivers in a glen where many waters met, and, following it, came to the strand towards sunset three or four miles away from the scene of his disembarkation. But he fortunately recognised a nobly crested headland, which he had admired at that time, and which now guided him to his goal. With satisfaction he saw the canoe lying just as he had left her, in the hollow of the swarded bank, resting on milk-white gravel, and screened by the translucent greenery of beechen boughs.

It was too late, he thought, to set out on his voyage, since a wandering cliff-wall certainly

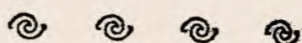


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appeared to make clear daylight desirable for any seafarer in its probable neighbourhood ; so he spent the brief gloaming in foraging for supper and the morrow's provisions. Elmède had given him a supply of little sunshine-flavoured rolls, packed in a fine green-and-white basket so daintily that he had never had the heart to disarrange her handiwork, which he often contemplated with pleasure. But he found no difficulty in obtaining abundance of the fruits and edible plants which grew round about. Before the last gleams had melted away over the sea, he had collected more than he could carry in his little craft, and he betook himself to his mossy couch with the intention of setting forth at dawn. If he failed to reach the barrier while his stores held out, he must return, and attempt another expedition in a larger boat. Then he fell asleep with the sound of the sea in his ears, and continued, but more high-fantastically, his half-waking dreams of the afternoon.

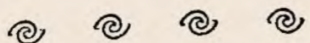
Sunrise sent shafts of light quivering back to him already on his way, and some distance from the

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shore. A soft breeze followed him, wafting the canoe along as easily as if it had been some deftly curved flower-petal. The air around him was as fresh as dew, the water beneath him as clear as air, and the sunshine put a spirit of joyance into both. Denis felt strangely exhilarated even beyond the degree explicable by his pleasant surroundings. He seemed to himself to be on the verge of some enchanting discovery. Hours slipped by, however, and no trace of that which he was seeking came in sight. Not a breath of haze dimmed the horizon ; not a stain or fleck flawed the transparent blue of sky and sea. He began to debate whether it would be advisable to sail out still farther from the shore, and thus increase the likelihood of approaching, or being approached by, the cliff-wall in the darkness, or to diminish this by keeping along on a course parallel to the coast until the return of day.

While he was still undecided, the thought occurred to him that his music, supposing it really to have had any part in causing the remarkable appearances which he had observed on the other



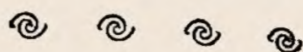
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side of the mysterious barrier, might now have the effect of attracting it towards him. An experiment of this kind had ever a strong temptation for him, embodied in the curved, brown shape, dear to his sight and touch; so he now took up his violin and began to play.

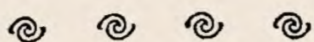
It was not long before he completely lost sight of the special object he had in view, and wandered off into mazes of mere purposeless pleasure. Time sped swiftly by, as is its wont in such places. To Denis it seemed that he had been drifting and fiddling only a short while, when he strayed into his mother's slumbrous Dream melody. Yet, as he happened to look up at the end of it, he saw that the last long, golden rays from the west were almost failing to touch him with their fiery fingers, while in the east a lily-leaf moon had begun to glisten, weaving a more and more substantial tissue of light.

And far out to sea he saw on the horizon's rim a grey line growing, which was something other than merely the mist of even. This he could not doubt as he watched it, though across so wide

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a space, for he clearly perceived that there was a solid core enveloped in the shifting vapours which hung about it. Evidently, too, the sullen grey bank was advancing towards him at a speed much greater than his own, which had become a leisurely creep before a languid breeze. Despite the gathering of the dusk he was presently aware that he could trace definite outlines in the vague shapelessness, and that these grew steadily more distinct. They betokened nothing of less magnitude than a huge mountain range. From the sombre mistiness at their base, which threw a belt of gloom far off on the water, enormous masses towered up ; sharp peaks notched the air ; rounded summits, like gigantic cowed heads, seemed to stoop over it. And with their waxing distinctness kept pace in Denis's mind a speculation as to whether the movements of this formidable object were likely to be arrested or diverted ere it reached a certain insignificant little craft, which lay in its present course ; were it otherwise, there was hardly room for speculation about the consequences to the little craft. Nor did there seem to be any means



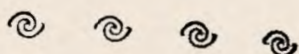
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of taking steps to avert them, as paddling back against wind and tide was a progress so slow that it could do nothing avail in the face of such a rapid onset.

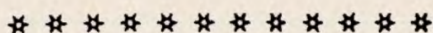
Naturally Denis had ceased to play whilst making these observations, which he found of a sufficiently engrossing interest. But he did not at first connect the cessation of his music with the fact that by-and-by the movement he was watching seemed to be checked suddenly, yet, so to speak, not abruptly—that is to say, it came to an end without any preliminary slowing down, as gently as if a cloud had paused in mid heaven. Then, indeed, envisaging the dark and rugged front, furrowed into chasms, buttressed with stark promontories, and thrusting up awful peaks, the reflection occurred to him that his experiment might really be accountable for its presence at such close quarters, and that if the thing had gone much farther, he might have had reason to rue his success.

For all that he could not resist the desire to attempt a repetition of it. The power of moving

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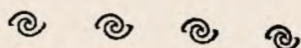
mountains is perhaps one that leads to recklessness in its possessors, at least while the charm of novelty attends it ; and Denis, keeping a wary eye on his colossal neighbour, struck up a graceful minuet.



HIS imprudence was either punished or rewarded by a total failure. He played for some time, not relaxing his anxious look-out ahead, but he was certain that the range did not either advance or recede. Thus the whole matter became doubtful again, and the more so because he overlooked the fact that his playing on this occasion differed in two points from his last performance, inasmuch as it had not included the Sleep and Dream melody, and he had not for a moment lost himself and his purpose in his music.

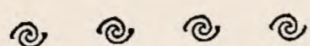
He now deliberated for a while how he should spend the coming night. The shores which he had left behind him, so far off that they lay in a softly folded haze, had a much more hospitable aspect than the gaunt and ghastly crags confronting him. His thoughts went back wistfully to the woodland strand with its canopies of blossomy

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branches, and its silvery-rimmed swarded creeks, and murmurous basking-places ; but in the end he turned away from it, for his present slow progress would, he reckoned, bring him about daybreak close under the wall of cliffs, supposing it to remain stationary, and he concluded that by continuing to sail on through the dark hours he would save time, and lessen the risk of being espied, and perhaps intercepted on his way. Accordingly he ate for supper some pear-like fruits, and looked at, but did not eat, Elmède's rolls in their dainty little hamper; after which he had no further occupation wherewith to fill the time until the coming of sleep.

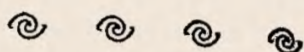
It was only to be expected in these circumstances that he should fall to meditation, for which he had such ample material. As he floated along through the mother-o'-pearl tinted twilight, which whitened beneath the moon, he was keenly conscious of what lay beyond that rampart of rock and mist. His past days seemed to send forth their voice across it—a voice whose tones, mournful and thrilling, jangled through with tones



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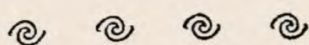
discordant and harsh, were a spell that conjured up a host of memories. The sights and sounds of the old life came back to him unblurred, unconfused by any change in themselves ; yet he felt that for him they were different. He did not doubt that he had seen what he had seen and heard what he had heard, just as he remembered it ; but he found no small difficulty in realising how entirely he had taken how much of it as a matter of course. Briefly, he wondered that he could have tolerated day by day such pervasive discomfort, ugliness, and dirt. All this, indeed, was only the scenery, the setting of his life-drama, and had always interested him mainly through its effect on the few persons who had been his fellows. When they were so no longer, its manifold shortcomings had grown for him a circumstance of little import, rather to be approved, perhaps, as warranting and emphasising a "well out of it" on his friends' account. Many a time had this view presented itself to him, even on his southern travels, where he had fared in comparative freedom from odious incidents, yet had

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ever and anon met with grievances due to loathly living things, or noxious extremes of heat or cold or damp or drought.

But now, as he mused, he found himself thinking with ever more bitter repugnance of the old world's blemishes, and he soon discovered that this arose from his endeavour to look at them through another person's unaccustomed eyes ; for this person was one whom he felt beyond measure reluctant to imagine as dismayed and disgusted by a glimpse of his native place. And how otherwise could he conceive Elmède to be affected by any moderately truthful description of what actually existed there, or any sketch of its terrible past history, or, above all, by any frank avowal of the utter darkness that shrouded the destinies of his race, "impierceable by power of any star" ever yet risen upon it ? Speedily, he thought, would the brightness of those false hopes be extinguished in Elmède's eyes, and he shrank from anticipating that moment, which thrust itself into his mind, with the recollection of Destran's down-cast looks as an ominous presage. Questing about

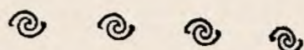


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for some redeeming points on which he might honestly dwell, one alone occurred to him. In the old world, so full, for the most part, of dreary noises, the gift and grace of music was to be found, prized and cherished by some, by none banned and proscribed or associated with despairing terror. He was obliged, however, to admit that this entailed many countervailing evils ; that music's self, as "sweetest things turn sourest by their needs," could, and did, degenerate into lamentable hideousness, while he knew too well which way the balance would dip if the sounds and silences of this strange land were weighed at large against those of his own.

Pondering on such things as these, and drifting slowly over the still waters, he soon grew drowsy, and began to sleep fitfully, ever and anon waking up to catch, through the moonlight, glimpses of the black cliff-façade which grew almost imperceptibly nearer. The repeated breaking and joining of the thread of consciousness is a process which lengthens out time in wonderful ways, and it seemed to him that a great many hours

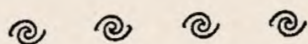
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must have passed since daylight faded. But at length he fell steadily asleep, and did not wake again until the sun had risen.

Its beams did not shine on him, for he was sailing well within the far-flung shadow of the cliff, which towered at not more than two or three furlongs' distance. His sleep had come near lasting too long, he thought. Indeed, only that the wind had shifted somewhat, and was taking him on an oblique course, his rousing would probably have been rude and disastrous, for with its monstrous precipices descending in huge slabs, blank and smooth, broken only by chasms which led into murkier gloom, and about the cavern-mouths of which the white surf wove ghostly sheets, swirling in wild eddies, no shore could have threatened a fiercer reception.

Denis decided to take advantage of the favouring breeze, and skirt along the base for a while before trying his musical experiment. He wished to make some observations, which might not afterwards be possible ; so he presently turned to the left, keeping the cliffs on his right hand.



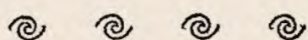
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Of the shore he had quitted over-night not a trace was now visible, and this seemed to make the scene of his venture all the more uncanny and forbidding. He felt an intense curiosity, as he scanned the vast bulk of this rampart, which, to all appearances, standing rooted in the deep, could yet traverse it to and fro, doing so, moreover, without any displacement of the water—for Denis remembered that its swift approach had sent no enormous ripple washing before it. Either its solid-seeming substance must be light enough to float, he thought, or it must stalk along on prodigious sliding piles, somewhat in the fashion of a *pont roulant*, which long years ago had been a marvel of his childhood, as he watched it plying in the straits between two little Norman seaport towns. Something of that child's eager inquisitiveness urged him now to take the closest view, and to peer and pry about those awful foundations; but then, just as he was altering his course to make straight for the cliff, he recalled what Lynmarch had told him about the impassable belt girdling the whole extent

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of the barrier. How correct the information had been he promptly discovered, for he had not gone more than a couple of his boat's lengths when he found himself stopped dead by some mysterious power, which repulsed every attempt to draw in nearer to the cliff-wall. Soon he desisted, and perforce acquiesced in the necessity of remaining outside a certain invisible boundary line, traced at an unvarying distance from the base. As the breeze had begun to freshen, he scudded along at a brisk rate for an hour or more. The distance which he had to keep was not sufficient to hinder him from getting a good view of the details of the great crags, more especially since no vapour enfolded them now, as it had done on the evening of his first arrival. Everywhere they presented the same savage front, varied chiefly by projecting bluffs and receding hollows, all black, naked, and devoid of any vestige of life, were it so much as a trail of seawrack. It seemed to him that as there could be no question of circumnavigating this rocky girdle, he would gain nothing by further

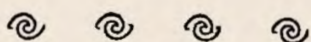


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postponement of his test, so he fixed upon the thither side of a promontory, which was coming in sight, as the place where he would begin to play.

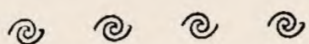
When he had reached and doubled it, he saw before him a long stretch of the cliffs veiled with a light mist, scarcely more than a haze. Here, then, while the view was still clear, he would carry out his purpose, and with this intention he taddled off a little way, for he judged it advisable to give himself the chance of a slight start, should any sudden movement of the mountain-range follow, although he was now inclined to conjecture that the zone of repulsion might prevent any perilous result to his canoe, as it apparently made all contact impossible. Taking up his violin, he began to play softly, not without a touch of the sentiment expressed by that reduced person of Quality, who used to cry faintly : *Muffins, muffins ! I hope nobody hears me*. Nobody did hear him, it seemed—at least nothing happened to suggest the contrary. His little thread of music ran on through a wide

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hush, broken by no other sound, save the lapping of the water against the rock. The shadow shrank over the bright sea, pursued by blinking sun-sparkles, and the air grew warmer and stiller as noontide drew on, else no change was to be seen—no transfiguring golden glow on the sullen stone, no wild water-way cleft open to let him through. His experience yesterday had taught him not to expect any immediate results ; but when he had played, and paused, and played again many times without effect, he naturally began to look for it with less and less confidence. At length his hope was almost quite superseded by a sense that he had been baffled and frustated, so far as a passage of the barrier was concerned, and that he possessed no power of achieving it.

His surmise of this was accompanied, as might have been predicted, by a disposition to rate much more highly than heretofore the privilege from which he found himself debarred. Candidly he would have been obliged to admit that everything discountenanced the likelihood of his desiring



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to return either now or at any future time from his sojourn in this strange land. Between him and the old world lay a barrier of dreary memories and present desolation, as obstructive to the forming of such wishes and resolves in his mind as the physical obstacle before him could be to their fulfilment. Yet from beyond it did something cry to him, awaking in answer a sentiment compounded of constancy, perverseness, and compunction. No other means had he of expressing this save his music, and as he played on, giving utterance as best he could to its various shades and phases, without aught else in view, he wandered at last into that melody slumbrous and dreamy of which he had often made him a requiem for bygone sorrow and a reveille for joy to come. It seemed to him that he was bidding farewell for ever to all his past, and he felt like an Adam shut into Paradise.

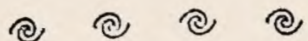
Suddenly looking towards his left hand, as he faced the cliff, he saw a motion among the dim mists which hung about it there. They were drifting nearer to him, and growing denser as they

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drifted. He glanced to the right, and there, likewise, were mists gathering and floating towards him ; soon they would meet, and blot out the cliff. Of course the mere fact of mists drifting was not in itself any way remarkable ; still the peculiar circumstances of the case did give it a special significance, and Denis gazed with all his eyes. He continued to play, however, and then for the first time it occurred to him that not only now, but on both former occasions when noteworthy effects had followed his music, this Sleep and Dream melody had been his theme. There-upon a strong belief sprang up in his mind that he was about once more to witness some interesting developments. The event justified it completely.

Soon the rolling, faint-grey vapours flowed together, spreading a veil behind which the black face of the rock was hidden. Then through them slowly waxed a soft, daffodil-coloured glow, which deepened until it had wrought their whole fabric into a fleece of fiery gold. For a little space this hung motionless, casting down wide, gorgeous

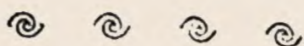


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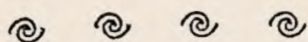
reflections on the mirroring waters ; but by-and-by it quivered from top to bottom, and was thrilled with vibrating filaments of a fierce, white flame, whereupon, as if rent along such a burning seam, it parted asunder, swinging back on either hand in crumpled folds. But what it now disclosed was not the sheer blank wall that it had been drawn across, for the ghastly rock-front was now fissured by a cleft, which pierced straight through it, running on, narrow and dark, until at the farther end a dwindled window of cold, bluish light glimmered ; and Denis knew that this was shining in the old world.

About the entrance to these straits tossed a wild flurry of whirling surf, as a strong current was setting in at it, so that jostling foam-crests leaped and crowded. Without, where they caught the sheen of the radiant mist, they seethed like boiling gold ; but when they had weltered in over the grim threshold they bore their spectral white gleams on down the deepening obscurity where they were lost to sight. Whether or no he should follow them was a question that immediately rose in

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Denis's mind. That the passage was practicable he inferred from his former adventure. It would be a shooting of rapids in a very narrow channel with a chance of being trapped Argo-wise on the way by an untimely closure. From the other side, again, he supposed, reasoning from analogy, that he would be able in like manner to return. But this was a point over which he hesitated, so much hingeing upon it that he felt the need of further evidence before he durst assume it proven. Exclusion from Paradise could not lightly be risked, however reluctantly he might consider himself a prisoner within its borders. Moreover, he said to himself, there was no urgency in the matter. Since his music could command an entrance at any time, he would be wise to wait for some opportunity more favourable than the present, when he must get back without much delay to the Lynmarches. Thus reflecting, he became aware that the strong current, straining past him towards the new water-way, had begun to tug at the canoe, and this helped him to make up his mind. He would sail on a bit farther, test his power on the



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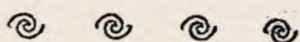
barrier once more, and then steer for the shores he had left yesterday.

With this purpose he laid down his violin, and let himself drift just within the hitherto unapproachable belt ; but fearing lest he should be drawn into some irresistible vortex, he quickly paddled out of it again, and resumed his voyage, keeping at the same distance as before from the foot of the cliff. He had gone silently a very little way, when he saw the golden light fade out of the mist, which drew together once more, and then floated, dwindling off. The fissure, he saw, had closed, and left no trace of any opening.

Scarcely had he made this observation when he was startled by a shout, and directly afterwards a small boat darted alongside of his, and paused there, as swiftly and deftly as if it had come on the wings of a swallow. In it sat Destran.

“I’ve come to look you up, you see,” he said, “having got away rather sooner than I expected. I hope you don’t mind.”

Though Denis was certainly glad of Destran’s



company in itself, he could not be sure whether he did mind or not, for as he politely replied, he was wondering how much his friend had seen. That the strange illumination of the mists could have escaped his notice seemed quite impossible, but it was less evident that he had been near enough to know of the music. Denis's conjecture that he had been so was, however, confirmed by what Destran did not say. Such is the difficulty of excising any one particular topic from conversation without leaving gaps which betray the process. Now, accordingly, Denis argued, from the fact that Destran made no allusion to having witnessed anything out of the common, that he had not only seen it all, but had heard the playing and guessed the motive of this voyage. Neither of them, however, broke the silence once established on that subject, or made any sign, save perhaps by looking rather hard at each other now and then by stealth.

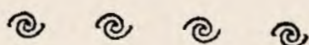
That Destran should abstain from comment surprised Denis all the less because it was simply a continuance in the course which they both had

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adopted ever since, on the day of Lynmarch's accident, their talk had turned so indiscreetly on foreign affairs. Its depressing effect on Destran's spirits had never worn off, and though he had clearly kept the information received strictly to himself, that could afford only small comfort to Denis, who was constantly haunted by a sense, firstly, of how much more knowledge of the same dolorous kind he could from inexhaustible stores impart, and next, of how steadily the time approached when he would be called upon to do so. Well might it happen, he said to himself, that they would all curse the day that brought him to their land.

This thought was vividly present to him now while Destran explained how he had tracked the car to the beach, where, missing the canoe from her berth, he had concluded that Denis had gone to sea, and had followed him in a swift boat borrowed from a friend. Then, still with a significant ignoring of the circumstances in which they had come together, he suggested that they should both continue their voyage in his boat, and tow the

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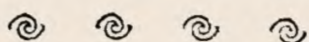


tardier canoe. Denis agreed, and the noiseless bit of clockwork brought them back speedily to where the shore lay dispread like a branchful of green leaf and blossom dipped in a crystal flood.

* * * * *

AFTER this enterprise Denis had a time which was fully and enjoyably occupied. As Lynmarch's recovery proceeded he found that he could employ himself usefully in hearing his manuscript notes read aloud, and dictating others. They all took turns in helping him thus, but Avril, having more knowledge of the special subject with which that part of his work dealt, could give him more effectual assistance than any one else, and Elmède and Destran were therefore generally free to devote themselves to Denis's entertainment. They undertook the task all the more zealously because it was Lynmarch's wish that their guest should be shown as much as possible of the country and people, pending the statement which this mishap had postponed ; and Denis, on his part, had the best will in the world to fall in with their views.

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The more he saw of this strange land, and the dwellers therein, the more deeply was he impressed with the fairness of their fortunes. A sense of its charm and beauty grew upon him daily, his admiration taking ever a keener edge, that would not be blunted. Here, it seemed, nothing was spoiled by use. In point of fact some extremely pleasant circumstances in his new life had to become familiar before he could fully appreciate them. It was some little time before he unlearned a habit of expecting, and taking precautions against, sundry more or less serious disagreeables, the absence of which he did not realise. Only actual experience proved to him, for instance, that the glory of golden sunshine, which was ripening oranges and bananas, and luring great, incense-breathing lilies into blossom, might be basked in bareheaded with the utmost impunity, and would be found not oppressive but exhilarating as an accompaniment to any sort of exertion. Or that in making plans for the morrow there was no need to reckon with the chance of such weather as would drench or blow or freeze them all out

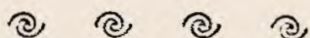


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of practicability. At first it was impossible for him to leave off assuming that the trees' leafy shadows must be haunted by a humming cloud of poisonous flies, or to feel confident that none of the detestable tribe had mingled themselves with his food and drink. In short, freedom from the conditions imposed by surroundings hostile and harmful at every turn to human life and happiness, was a boon larger than could be grasped all at once, and his gradual acceptance of it formed no small element in his pleasures.

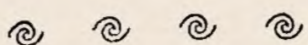
But of course that served rather as an atmosphere for other more definite enjoyment. Among the many sources of this were frequent excursions taken sometimes in the company of both Elmede and Destran, sometimes with one or other of them alone ; sometimes on foot, sometimes by car ; very often by way of a river, floating on through the lights and shadows and fragrance of labyrinthine woodlands. The objects of these excursions were extremely various, but always interesting, and the circumstances would have made them delightful, had they been never so

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aimless. They brought Denis into wide tracts of the country round about, a land of inexhaustible beauties, wherein reigned perpetually the middle summer's spring, that delectable season whereof the poet knows. He visited exquisite vales and meres, and climbed to heights where mountain snow was mingled wondrously with tropical leafage and bloom. Great odorous flower-cups of glowing azure and scarlet and gold, filled with feathery whiteness, had a refreshing grace. And to the sight of vast cataracts he travelled, led by their melodious thunder echoing down leagues of solemn pine forest.

He became acquainted, too, with the inhabitants of this strange land, a race whose exemption from the penalties alike of Adam and of his most modern representative seemed to have made them marvellous pleasant company. An infinite variety characterised them, limited only by certain degrees of well-being, good-nature, and common-sense, below which they practically never fell. He beheld the perfection of smoothness with which the wheels of daily life could be caused to run,

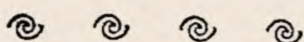


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given the attainment of sovran sway and masterdom over the forces of nature, by the power of appropriating and applying their undirected energies ; and he also saw how easily and happily a man could, if need or desire were, dispense with every means by which that nature was amended. Already, in fact, he had learned by experience that if he were here thrown wholly upon natural resources, he would meet with far less discomfort than would have been entailed at home by the bursting of a water-pipe or the blowing of an east wind.

Everywhere he came upon outlets into the world of Art—letters, painting, sculpture—and could hardly guess whether the givers or the receivers were to be reckoned as more blessedly partaking of its joys. To one of its domains, indeed, there was no entrance accessible, as he ever and anon remembered with chagrin—the voice of music was mute. Everywhere he found that absolute equality of external circumstances which allows the true personality to manifest itself undisguised. If anybody, so to speak, stood a

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head and shoulders above his neighbours, it was by virtue of his own stature, and not because he stalked on stilts. Nobody possessed unwieldy wealth, or desired it, any more than he wished to devour everything he saw. Nobody was poor, or could be so, except by his own will ; in which case, having what he wanted, his poverty seemed dubious. Buying and selling there was none. Everybody did what he liked, or liked what he did, none the less, assuredly, if it served some useful end. There was no fashion in likings or dislikings, or in anything else. Nobody went labelled, and nobody ever considered what his neighbours might think about matters that concerned himself alone.

To some such effect, at least, were the first rough notes which Denis made as he went hither and thither about the country. But along with them he was constantly receiving impressions of a general felicity which he did not attempt to analyse.

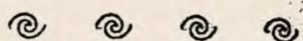
And over it all, he felt, brooded invisibly the shadow—the shadow of the end. Denis, pondering upon this, said to himself that if his own



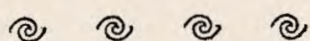
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lot had always lain there, he might well have thought of this shadow as cast by the wings of some heavenly being, "half angel and half bird," come to waft him on, with its strains of rapturous melody, into a yet more blissful region. For where, he asked himself, would he have found any reason to surmise a darker destiny? Did not all things tend towards a good, which ever emerged with more radiant mien from the little breath of seeming evil that rose to obscure it? Nevertheless he saw clearly that this was not the view taken by the people around him. Their dread and doubt spoke eloquently in the very muteness which he so deplored. It appeared to him that the mere vague terror of the unknown, as unknown, could not be sufficient in the circumstances to account for this, because there was little or nothing to make the unknown terrible. Contrasting, say, Destran's experience of life with his own, he thought that a confident expectation of happiness continuing to come would have been on the one part quite as fully warranted as on the other a foreboding of the contrary.

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The question perplexed him much ; but gradually he began to understand how, seen through the eyes that had looked on life only in this strange land, the remotest possibility of ceasing to be must seem a menace of direful import. Hamlet's question—which, by the way, he never did consider—would not for a moment have occurred to one of them ; the deep and liquid rest that Shelley dreamed of for his brother would have been for them a doom malign. After a time, also, he perceived what was the master fear in the minds of those who looked forward to a life beyond the Mist. It was an apprehension that they might not be destined there to reknit the broken ties, and regain the friends whom they had lost. He saw, moreover, that the utter severance, even if it were but temporary, would surely seem a more serious and less tolerable calamity to them than to any one familiar with the old world's ways. For in this land friendship need very seldom be tried, and affection tormented, by long, weary, wordless absences, so perfect was the system of inter-communication,

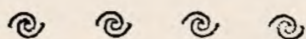


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so resourceful the ingenuity with which were contrived the means of keeping in touch with the farthest-faring friend. When to these considerations Denis added the unmistakable fact that friendship, general and particular, occupied a far larger share in the existence of his neighbours here than it had done in any society he had ever known before, he wondered less at what had struck him as an inexplicably anxious and despondent attitude towards the veiled future.

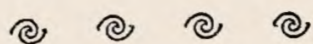
But a sentiment which did not by any means diminish in its intensity was the reluctance with which he anticipated the time when he would be obliged to give his hosts an account of the world beyond the Barrier. Day by day he became more painfully alive to the horror which his revelations must create ; and day by day he felt a stronger regard for the people whose minds he was to fill with discord and dismay. It seemed to him that he met with nothing but kindness wherever he went, and made very few acquaintances who did not appear to be altogether likeable. To those earliest ones, with whom alone he had

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become intimate, his attachment grew apace, so that, unsociable as had hitherto been his habits, he now found himself possessing a larger circle of friends than he had had since the old days when he and his sisters were children together. Their companionship helped to make amends for the silencing of his music. Still it was in that music that he sought his most effectual consolation, for he clung to a desperate hope that between it and the Music of the Mist some connection might yet be traced, whereby to link with brighter and gentler auguries the destinies of mortal men.

He was very glad, therefore, when one day Destran confided to him a wish for some instruction in violin playing, and told him of a plan by which it could be managed secretly, if he would consent. They had not yet brought him, Destran said, to see the settlements known as the Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Fear, which existed on a tract of the coast at a considerable distance. Destran proposed that Denis and he should now undertake an inspection of them, and should use the opportunity afforded by a visit to those out-



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of-the-way districts for the desired music-lessons. He did not give any especial reason for his wish, with which Denis was more than willing to comply. Though on different grounds, they were both agreed that it would be better not to tell Elmède of any intentions beyond visiting the settlements. It was evident that Destran shunned the mention of all such matters in her presence, as if dreading lest some chance word let fall should enlighten her as he himself had been enlightened to his sorrow, while Denis, perhaps by the sort of intuition that "belongs to love's fine wit," was aware that from every reference to his past she contrived to draw materials for building up higher the baseless fabric of hope, which she had founded on an utter misinterpretation of his statements. He knew well that she dwelt much on these delusions. Often he saw her eyes full of happy dreams, which he could not find it in his heart to begrudge her, but which gave him rueful thoughts about the day of her awakening.

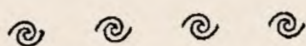
There was no fear, Destran said, that Elmède would embarrass them by proposing to join their

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expedition, for these settlements were a dismal spectacle, into the neighbourhood of which she would never venture. In fact, Destran himself spoke of them with a kind of compassionate aversion, as Denis might have spoken of a colony of wilful lepers or lunatics. On the way thither, which was a drive of three or four hours, Destran told him some details about the institutions. They were the last remaining in that part of the country, where they had anciently been more numerous. Their inhabitants were people who believed that the Music of the Mist could be scared away by ugly sights and noises, and who consequently devoted themselves to the production of these, divesting their lives of everything that gave them pleasantness. "As you may suppose," said Destran, "they are not at all desirable neighbours, and for ages past they have been obliged to make their abode in a solitary place. Happily their number is now very small, and steadily diminishing, for nobody joins them in these days."

"And I conclude that the results don't in any way bear out their theories," said Denis.



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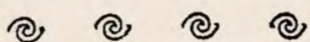
“Not in the least degree,” said Destran ; “there is absolutely no difference in the average frequency of departures. But as in such small communities the coming of the Mist happens, of course, very rarely, they maintain the belief that they are much more exempt from it than the rest of the world, and their isolation keeps them in ignorance, which allows them to continue so deluded. I am told there is a man now in the Brotherhood who has lived there almost ever since it was first established, and the rest consider him to be immortal—a dreary fate in the circumstances I should think. Perhaps we shall see him, for we may as well visit the Brotherhood. The Sisterhood it will be better to avoid, unless you particularly wish to inspect it, as they are distressed when anybody comes. It happened once that not long after they had had a visitor one of the sisters was called away, and they have now made it an article of their creed that strangers are fatal ; so it would be kinder to leave them alone.”

To this Denis assented, and they gave a wide berth to the walls of the Sisterhood, though not

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so wide but that there reached them the sound of a dismal, metallic clang, reiterated monotonously.

The abode of the Brotherhood was situated near the seashore, on a level piece of ground, from which every tree had been cleared away, and which had been all paved with large, smooth flag-stones. Their house was surrounded by a high wall of yellowish brick, ornamented with patterns in red brick, and a vandyked top. From a long way off the travellers had heard a confused noise, composed evidently of many differently produced sounds, howls, and screeches, as of fog-horns and steam-whistles, violent explosions, the braying of discordant tubes, and yells which seemed to proceed from human throats. With some difficulty they made themselves heard through this din, and a door was opened to them by one of the Brotherhood. He was a young-looking man, clad in clumsy garments of drab and black plaid. His countenance was harassed and bewildered, and his conversation, which the prevailing uproar interrupted frequently, showed a dearth of ideas and common-sense. A few men

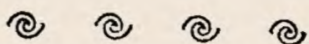


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in the same hideous garb were dispersed about the paved square into which the door gave entrance. Most of them were occupied in producing some uncouth noise. As Denis passed them by, he thought that the greater number of them "sad or foolish seemed"; but two or three wore an expression of serenity, as if they felt conscious of how they were securing their own safety, and considered the deed both meritorious and satisfactory.

The visitors' guide, groaning and growling occasionally, but explaining that it was not at *them*, showed them over the house, which matched its surroundings so well that, far from presenting any conventual features, it reminded Denis of a seaside Casino; and they then quickly took their leave. When the outer door had closed against them, a partial lull in the noises followed, caused probably by an impulse of natural curiosity which led the inmates to inquire about their guests, and during this pause Denis, at Destran's instigation, began to play on his violin. Immediately there ensued a hubbub which surpassed its

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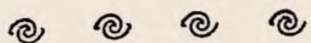


predecessor. Shouts and shrieks arose, plainly from people rushing to and fro in terror, while the artificial noises were resumed with redoubled vehemence, by persons, it seemed, commanding more presence of mind. Amid the turmoil the two friends drove away. "You may be sure," said Destran, "that you have been the means of establishing an important precedent here. With the logical acumen which characterises them, they will draw from to-day's event the inference that the arrival of strangers is certain to be followed by an approach of the Music of the Mist ; and furthermore that an outrageous din will always effectually ward it off."

But though he spoke lightly, his tone was not cheerful, and he seemed to have contemplated the Brotherhood with a melancholy mortification.

"Do the inmates ever regain their reason and come away ?" asked Denis.

"Cases of the sort have been known," said Destran, "but very rarely, for the craze must have taken so firm a hold on a man before he could be reduced to such a condition that his

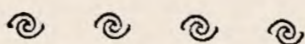


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chances of shaking it off are extremely small. However, as I said, the malady is becoming extinct, and it seems likely that the present Brothers will be the last of their kind."

He hesitated for a moment, and then went on :
" I need hardly tell you how fully conscious I am that the miserable mental state of these unfortunate people is only a morbid exaggeration of a feeling that is common to us all. It is the hope of our whole world that we may at some future time discover this feeling to be irrational. Some people consider it not to be in the nature of things that such a discovery should occur on this side of the Mist. Others, most people I think, believe it to be possible either that light may gradually penetrate, or that some sudden revelation may take place as a result of the researches which are proceeding in every branch of science. And others again have thought—have perhaps had some reason to think—that the knowledge we are seeking may be brought to us by means of intercourse with a race hitherto inaccessible, who live under conditions widely

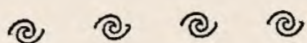
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different from ours, and who, possibly to make amends for less favourable circumstances on this side, are free from our ignorance and anxiety about what lies beyond."

Destran's wistful tone made his conjecture so nearly an interrogation that Denis could not refrain from admiring the dexterity with which it had been kept from becoming one outright. But his main impression was far graver and far gloomier. He was acutely aware that Destran had spoken thus in hopes of eliciting some assent to his speculation, some word that would dispel the sinister effect of those truths about the inaccessible race now disquieting his mind.

There was a brief pause, painful enough to seem long, during which Denis debated with himself how he should reply. Consciousness of a strong desire not to give a completely disappointing response made him distrustful and self-suspicious ; still it seemed to him that he was guilty of nothing worse than some economy of truth as he answered : "Of course nobody can tell what discoveries may not come from such a source.



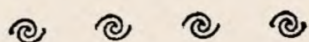
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It is even possible that two ignorances might coalesce into knowledge, if they comprised different elements, as they probably would do."

Denis could not flatter himself that his evasion was successful. Very clearly Destran accepted it as nothing better ; nor did he take up the hope it vaguely suggested instead of that which he had to lay down. But he dropped the subject, and after a short silence proposed that they should drive on to some place suitable for a violin lesson. Accordingly they sought out a secluded glen, which was threaded by a swift stream, and at one end opened on the hyacinth-blue of the sea. Here, where there was small risk of disturbance, both were glad to divert their thoughts by the most engrossing intricacies of the accomplishment on the acquisition of which Destran had resolved.

* * * * *

DENIS soon found that he had a remarkably apt pupil. Even in the course of the first lesson considerable progress was made, and but a few more put Destran in a fair way to proficiency. Nor was this all. His practising upon the Strad. had been accompanied by observations so minute and accurate that they enabled him to construct himself a very tolerable model of it, which he one day exhibited, to Denis's surprise. He had fashioned it out of some exceedingly fine-grained and rare wood, which had been seasoned by a peculiar process for the framework of certain delicate scientific instruments, and for the strings he had used the elastic fibres of tall, golden-brown reeds that grew on the strand. The aromatic and resinous cones of a tiny fir, elfin in stature, supplied the honey-coloured varnish. Its tone Denis found to be mellow and pure, and he regarded the crafts-

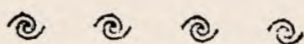


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manship of its maker with no small respect, which increased at the sight of Destran's swiftly attained mastery over his violin. It really seemed as if, allowed free scope to his gifts, this young man might presently become a combined Paganini and Straduarious. If the like were common among these people, Denis thought to himself, what illimitable fields of delight lay before them, could they rid themselves of the antipathy to music with which its associations had afflicted them.

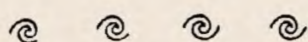
His faded hope that this might come to pass was revived by Destran's action, and he devoted himself *con amore* to the task of smoothing his pupil's path, and setting the goal of those studies in its most lovely aspect. Never had he played for his own solace so exquisitely as he did now in the lonely woods for his audience of one. And Destran was genuinely appreciative, listening eagerly, and practising with ardour and intelligence. He did not again revert to the subject they had quitted outside the Brotherhood's door ; but Denis fancied that he had quite recovered his

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good spirits, and argued that his enjoyment of this actual import from beyond the barrier must go far to counteract the effect of what were, after all, merely obscure and uncorroborated assertions made by a comparative stranger.

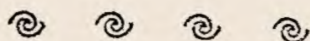
Meanwhile Denis Maine's sojourn in the company of the Lynmarches and Destrans was growing to them and to himself, if not a matter of course, at least a familiar fact, which tended less and less to seem merely an episode, an eddy in the current of their lives. It was wonderfully easy, Denis found, to become domesticated in that household. The luxurious simplicity of its material framework, wherein it was impossible to imagine himself troublesome, was the least part of the charm that made him feel himself so enjoyably at home. To live with its inmates, he had begun to think, would be happiness in any at all tolerable external circumstances. He sometimes tritely enough drew a parallel in his own mind between the physical and spiritual atmospheres which were breathed there—the one had the brilliance, softness, and geniality of the other. If he had



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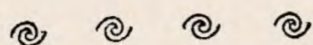
considered what were the predominating elements in the latter, he would have pronounced them to be good-nature and good-humour. Sometimes, indeed, he wondered whether his new associates could attach any meaning to the words sullenness and irritability, afflictions from which they seemed to be so entirely immune. Looking back to the first day that he had spent among them, he recollected that the nearest approach to any sort of irascibility had been Avril's occasional small outbreaks of humorous petulance, at which she was herself always the first to laugh. There were, of course, many reasons for this state of things everywhere apparent to the most superficial observer ; but Denis thought that the main cause must lie deeper rooted. He guessed it to spring from a sense of security created by their knowledge that the harm which could result from any untoward event was definitely limited, a knowledge the very contrary of ours, which assures us as a common commonplace that it is never possible to predict how fatal may be the consequences of the most unconsidered trifles. A

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sub-consciousness of this may account for much ill-temper displayed on seemingly inadequate grounds. None of us could tell, for instance, Denis reasoned, but that a grain of dust in his eye might lead to permanent blindness, or a wetting, to death, whereas in this strange land neither result could follow even the gravest disaster. Such a certainty could not but have a tranquillising influence, especially as it was supplemented by their other certainty that the sole event in life the consequences of which were, so to speak, altogether unlimited, lay utterly beyond the reach of any mortal haps and chances, and could not sanely be regarded as in any way affected by them. A wise fatalism forbade bootless effort and calculation.

But whatever the explanation might be, the thing itself gave existence an abiding charm. Gradually he caught the spirit of the place, and surrendered himself to the sheer joy of living, which his companions now manifested more clearly than at the time of his arrival, when it had been somewhat obscured by the exceptional circumstances. Even Lynmarch, notwithstanding his

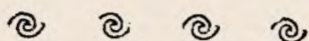


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disablement, appeared to be far from finding his time hang heavily, and in his shaded room a very cheerful party often assembled. Now and then, for his diversion, they borrowed from their friends some small children, whose discourse was an un-failing pleasure. At other times the conversation turned upon manifold scientific discoveries, which seemed to Denis as marvellous as any of the fairy tales current in his own infancy.

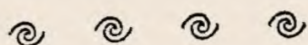
Above all he had the growing sense that he was no longer alone in a friendless world, and a disposition to trust the benevolence of his fate, which had given him Elmède Lynmarch for a neighbour. He had never seriously contemplated the possibility that she could ever be more to him than this, or that he should be less than satisfied therewith. In fact he was inclined to believe that she and Destran were destined for one another ; and his feeling towards her was still quite compatible with perfectly amicable sentiments towards Destran. Perhaps it was not of the kind that would ever lead him to build himself a hell in heaven's despite ; at any rate it now did

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but heighten his happiness. As the pleasant, varied hours went by, he tried to dismiss as completely as he could the recollection of the woeful story which he had to tell, and he supplemented his endeavours by dwelling upon the vague hope that after all his music might indeed bring a clue to the great mystery in such sort as to make his coming a joyful event on both sides of the barrier. His music itself and the interest of superintending Destran's successful studies added another delight to those golden days. Denis enjoyed them, with a mind that gathered tranquillity as they passed. Then came a sudden change.

One evening towards sunset Elmède and he returned from a long day's excursion, in the course of which they had travelled many leagues through a forest of wonderful blossoming pines, had seen a comedy acted in a natural amphitheatre beneath a canopy of feathery-fronded tree-ferns, and had called at the nearest store, an octagonal hall built of cedar and sandal wood, set in a lawn of purple pansies, for a supply of new books and



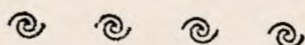
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papers. These made a little pile on a shelf in the car, and it was pleasant now and then to take out a volume and glance over its clear-looking pages.

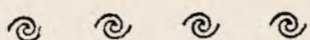
Just as they reached home, their car was caught up by a lad carrying letters. The mails were generally distributed by youths, who undertook the task for the pleasure of it, thereby usefully working off some of their superabundant energy, and performing it in a spirit of rivalry among themselves, which ensured the utmost punctuality and despatch. This lad now handed Denis a letter from Destran, who had started on some expedition the evening before. Elmède went in to see her brother, and Denis sat down on the steps of the porch to read his letter.

“Dear Maine,” it ran, “It seems to me rather doubtful whether what I am doing is expedient, or even quite justifiable, but I can devise nothing else that promises better from any point of view. I am setting out to reach your country if possible. A few days ago I ascertained by an experiment that the cliff-wall will open a passage to your

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Sleep and Dream melody played on my violin, as it did for you on the day when I met you there. Seeing that was what suggested the possibility to me ; but I had been wishing to make the attempt ever since the conversation we had at the time of Lynmarch's accident, for you then made some statements which I am disposed to think that I have grossly misunderstood. But if I have not, you must forgive me for saying that I find it easier to believe you to have been raving than reporting real facts, so incredibly shocking are they in themselves, and still more in their implications. Now, as I cannot doubt that the conditions of life on the other side of the barrier differ very widely from anything we have had any experience of here, my hope is for a misconception on my own part. Indeed I should not wonder if I met with much that no amount of description and explanation, nothing except actual seeing and hearing, could make clear to us. And it seems to me highly important that some one here should possess some first-hand knowledge of the kind at the time when you give us your account, which



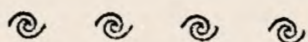
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might otherwise unavoidably mislead us in a very disastrous manner.

“ Yet although this is quite true, I am conscious that I have other more selfish motives in going, which perhaps influence me more than I suppose ; and that has made me hesitate. For one thing, I am, of course, intensely curious to see what there is on the other side ; and no doubt I am ambitious of being the first explorer. Then on quite different grounds I wish to be away from here for a while. Elmede Lynmarch and I have been neighbours and companions all her life, and, as I think she knows, she has my entire devotion. But her youth, and our having been so much together, are circumstances which might lead her to accept it against her real interests and inclination. My absence for a time would give her an opportunity to form other attachments, and also to judge about her own feelings towards me—whether or no they are more than just those of friend and friend.

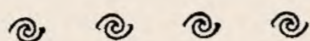
“ I have written to tell her and my mother that I have started on an exploring expedition,

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but I shall tell nobody except yourself that it is to be beyond the cliff-wall. The least I can do is to keep the secret I surprised, and I fear that I cannot anyhow acquit myself of having got my music-lessons on false pretences. If I don't return within a few weeks, you should perhaps explain, to Lynmarch at least, how matters stand. But I hope to be home again by that time, for the facts which I am chiefly concerned about ascertaining are of a sort obviously and immediately perceptible, so that I need not make a long stay. Until I have done this I can never, I find, give my mind to anything else, as what I understood you to say has conjured up a picture of your world which, if it corresponded at all to the reality, would alter our whole outlook upon life in a way nothing short of appalling. However, I earnestly hope to meet you again before long with all such apprehensions effectually dispelled by what I have seen beyond the barrier."

Having read to this point, Denis looked up, and looked round him. Across the woodland pleasance, flooded in every glade with the

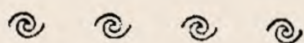


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glory of the sunset, came wafted to him a most delicate and dewily fragrant air, which brought a shadowy sound of rustling leaves and running water. And whence and whithersoever it might blow, Denis said to himself, nothing less charming than what he now beheld could come in its way all the land over. A reflection to which he added, "Heaven knows what sort of a place Destran may be in this minute."

He dropped his head on his hands, and considered this subject in a series of mental pictures, which came fast and thick ; he had no need to make invidious selections. Scene after scene presented itself to him, of an aspect naturally forbidding, and now viewed by a new light which became it vastly ill. A smoke-canopied manufacturing town, a slaughter-house, a city cemetery, a crowded music hall, a crippled beggar, a drunken row, a swarm of black-beetles—the aescrcidoscope shifted with interminable swiftness, to an accompaniment of horrible echoes. Again and again it seemed to run up crescendo a scale of misery, which had for leading note and keynote

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disease and death. And through it all he saw Destran going to and fro, amazement and bewilderment gradually yielding more ample place to abhorrence and disgust.

“Good Heavens,” he said, suddenly jumping up with a start of dismay, “what will become of him if he arrives penniless in any civilised country? Amongst uncivilised people he might have a better chance, but suppose he reaches us—a workhouse or a lunatic asylum seems uncommonly likely to be his portion, if nothing worse befalls him.”

This view of the matter so disquieted him that his first impulse was to follow immediately on his friend's track. But the incalculable doubtfulness of success in such an attempt checked him at once, and on reflection he felt himself bound to wait where he was for Destran's return. Destran himself evidently counted upon his doing so, and several other reasons seemed to make it advisable. That Destran should thus have utilised his music lessons without apprising his instructor, was an action which Denis was the less disposed to



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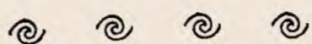
resent because he perceived how awkward his position would have been as Destran's only confidant. The responsibility of keeping silence beforehand would have weighed heavily upon him. Nevertheless he deeply regretted that he had not been given an opportunity of warning and advising this extraordinarily ignorant traveller. His information, however sceptically received, would certainly have proved useful on the other side, where the truth of his statements would only too soon have become glaringly manifest. As it was, he could not but think of Destran's plight with the profoundest anxiety, even when he confined himself to the question of ways and means. A singularly beautiful little watch, and the water-car in which he must be voyaging, were the only objects of any value in Destran's possession, so far as Denis knew; and what likelihood was there of either being profitably turned to account by an emigrant from lands where buying and selling had become extinct customs, it would seem, unknown ages ago?

This problem, which remained hopelessly un-

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solved, was far from being the sole one propounded by Destran's letter. The reference to Elmède startled Denis not a little, and interested him still more. To misunderstand the hint was hardly practicable, yet to construe it as an intimation that Destran meant to leave him a fair field as a not impossible wooer, seemed to Denis presumptuous in the extreme. As for taking action on it, that was an ambitious flight to which his fancy dared not soar. At no time had Denis Maine been prone to hold himself in unduly high esteem; albeit his recluse habits, coupled with his rare gift, might easily have tended to produce this result. On the contrary, rather, he had always ascribed his preference for his own company to some defect in his own character, and had been wont to regard himself as a futile sort of fiddling fellow, compared with the general run of mankind.

But since his arrival in this strange land his self-disparagement had become far more sweeping and more thoroughgoing, for he felt himself to be the representative of a race on a plane of



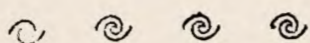
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civilisation lower than that of the people amongst whom he had come, and not only so, but set in circumstances such as to put the attainment of that higher level permanently beyond their reach, or even perhaps their desire. He identified himself, unfairly enough, with their wilful miseries, follies, and meannesses, the enslaving selfishness, jealousy, and sloth that gave force and fraud and greed a free hand wherewith to build up a social system after their own heart—a goodly structure where gourmandising and starvation, and rags and diamonds, confronted one another with only a pane of glass between. More justly he judged that he must be a sharer in the evil effects of the conditions inevitably imposed upon his race. He was aware that he had often viewed them as extenuating circumstances when the delinquencies of others were in question, and to assume that he could have himself escaped their baneful influence would be absurd. On the whole he thought of himself much as if he had been a Terra-del-Fuegian emerged from an abode of soot and grease into

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a villa on the Riviera ; nor save in his wildest dreams did he imagine Elmède as any more within his reach than some lovely flower blossoming in a star.

His own personal wishes and unworthiness, however, were not uppermost in his thoughts now, as he began restlessly to pace the verandah. What chiefly occupied him was a strong misgiving that it might be for the happiness of Elmède and all her people, if he departed from them without making any disclosures about his past. The expedient of remaining and giving a false report did not occur to him as requiring consideration ; what to some minds would have appeared a smooth and easy exit from the difficulty stood for his as an impassable obstacle casting the shadow of a colossal crime on whoso approached it. Yet when he thought of the facts he could scarcely resist a belief that truth-telling would be a crime of almost equal magnitude, though its shadow should fall in the opposite direction. And how was he to maintain the silence that would be his only other alternative

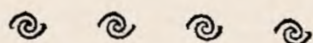


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if he stayed? In accordance with their agreement, the signal for breaking it would be Lynmarch's restoration to sight. Denis was shocked to find himself half wishing for an indefinite postponement of the event, so fraught had it become for him with threats of harm.

Man's life in this strange land had revealed itself to him as a thing of beauty, with every circumstance, save the explicit assurance, to warrant its possessors in the expectation that it would be for them a joy for ever. It was a thing apart, unique, unencumbered by any of those degrading kinships, unassailed by those irremediable afflictions, unmenaced by those despairful analogies that drag it down to lie hopeless at the threshold of obscurest doom. For every physical evil under that sun—and they were wondrous few—there was a remedy, perfect and unfailing; patience never missed her reward. Loss of time seemed ever the most serious consequence, for anodynes had made pain practically non-existent. Disease never had existed in any shape or form, least of all that wreck of mind and body brought on by

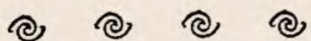
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lapsing years. Wholly absent, moreover—and herein lay the difference bearing perhaps most vitally on Denis's meditations—were those lower forms of life and consciousness which shade bewilderingly from man to brute and from brute to grub, composing a continual parody, for the most part repulsive and grotesque, upon the incidents of human existence.

And finally, as if to kindle new hope on the very verge of the crowning mystery, came the celestial radiance and the ineffable glory of music—surely divine portents. As Denis considered these things he was inclined to wonder that more confident auguries of good were not drawn from them by a race for whose behoof the whole course of their world seemed to have been ordered. Doubt of passing into some yet happier state of being might indeed appear only a sort of mental dizziness caused by the immensity of the prospect.

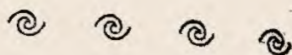
But when he had tried to put himself in the place of those who with such an experience to go upon should suddenly receive an account of life as he had known it, his imagination was always



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staggered by even the most limited view. And now Destran's action threw a terrible light on what was to come; for if so great were the consternation produced by a few casually dropped words, to how vast a bulk would it swell at any deliberate recital of our strange, eventful history? This sum in proportion stated itself gloomily and persistently to Denis, until with a faint gleam of comfort the thought glanced across his mind that Destran's absence might serve as an excuse for putting off the evil day, should he not have returned by the time that Lynmarch regained his sight. Possibly the letters to Elmède and Avril might express such a wish, unfortunately lacking in his own. Denis would have respected it religiously. That return would, he felt, in some measure lighten his burden of responsibility, as it would then no longer be in his power to keep the knowledge secret for good or ill. Next he reverted to Destran's chances of ever getting back, and weighed them in a troubled mood. Fears for the safety of his friend, and fears of what that safety might bring, pulled in opposite

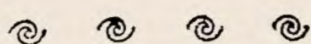
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directions, and the tug of war was so little to his liking that at last, to end it for the present, he joined the trio in Lynmarch's room.

There he found that Destran's abrupt departure had not caused much surprise. Avril and Elmède said that they had guessed him to be contemplating something of the sort for several days past, and though he had given them an extremely vague description of his plans, they all seemed confidently to expect his reappearance by the time of Lynmarch's recovery. The blind man himself was in excellent spirits as he sat in his dusky corner and counted the days that lay dwindling between him and the return of light. His joyful anticipation might have symbolised the soul of good shining through and transmuting all things evil—to anybody who had never seen other blind men sitting in forlorn patience with no spark a-glimmer on their thick darkness.

Denis fancied that Avril, at least, somewhat regretted Destran's step, and that there was a tinge of reproachfulness in her tone to Elmède, when speaking of the expedition, as if it were



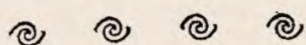
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one which could and should have been discouraged by a person who had neglected to do so. Against this covert accusation Elmède defended herself in like manner—or so Destran imagined—by dwelling with eagerness on the probability that Destran would find his travels most entertaining and instructive ; and she made sundry conjectures about his route and his purposes, all, as Denis was, of course, aware, very wide of the mark. But afterwards, when the conversation turned away to other subjects, she seemed preoccupied and rather listless, as if her interest had been left loitering behind.

* * * * *

FOR Denis Maine the time that followed was full of various anxieties, which made it seem slow in passing and short when passed. Some of them stood still and waited for him ; others flitted about him like bats' wings in the dusk, and perpetually threatened to alight. The date when Lynmarch would see again was steadily approaching ; it lay somewhere within the space of three known days. Any hour might bring Destran's return with amazing and terrible tidings. About these two events gathered a heterogeneous crowd of apprehensions, which Denis could seldom disperse, even when the pleasantest diversions presented themselves.

On the evening before the first of those three days he went out to walk along by the nearest river. Avril and Lynmarch were busily revising the final pages of his manuscript, the last bit



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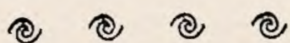
of work that he would do in the dark. Denis left them eager and joyful. It was singularly charming out of doors that sunset, for little swift showers had fallen through the afternoon, strewing odorous freshness and faery brilliance on leaf and spray. As he walked on by the clear, swift-flowing stream, the murmur of it soothed away his cares, and said that they were nothing worth. It seemed to be overflowing with happy oracles, that only wanted words for the utterance of its consoling message. Again and again it repeated itself to him with a new magic, as he returned to the brink after crossing some blossom-lit lawn, half girdled by the sweep of the curving banks. He hardly knew why he shortened so delightful a walk, until at last he came upon Elmède, sitting by the water's edge under a huge linden tree. Then the reason grew quite evident to him, almost before his bodily eyes could discern that the bower of glimmering green was shading the dark head with its silken wealth of soft and dusky tresses.

She was gazing wistfully down the stream,

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but when she looked round and saw him she rose up and hurried to meet him eagerly. He beheld the hope that he was bringing news fade out of her eyes as she drew near, and perhaps a wild hope of his own faded together with it. Nevertheless, they fell into cheerful talk, sauntering homewards by the river. It was fuller than usual, so that here and there it had just brimmed over its swarded rim, and made little crystal pools in mossy hollows close by. These tiny sheets of water lying on the grass, whence they gleamed jewel-like with the hues of many submerged flowers, had a wonderful fascination for Elmède, and she dabbled in them with a childish pleasure, while he was well satisfied to stand by and watch. A liquid mirror, lined with faintly flushed, crocus-shaped blossoms, and spacious enough to reflect a girl's fair face until her slender fingers had stirred the transparent silver into ripples, was a picture that no touch of time should thenceforth erase from his memory. Now and then it did strike him that there was something like a resolute turning away from a



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trouble in the attention which she devoted to these pretty trifles, with perhaps a shade more exclusiveness than seemed quite natural; but his own troubles made him glad to accept a refuge, and the enjoyment of the two was not by any means all feigning as they loitered along.

The sun was looking his last down a straight alley of great plane trees when they came in sight of the house; amid a fiery haze of amethyst and amber and cinnamon the curved earth-rim was tilting up against the broad disc of burning rose. Elmède watched it for a moment, and then she said: "I hope that my brother may see the sunset to-morrow or next day."

"I suppose," said Denis, "that he would be satisfied with the sight of something less splendid." He was dismayed to find that he could not echo her hope without an effort. In fact he half suspected himself of a positive wish to the contrary; but after a moment's reflection he acquitted himself of that charge. "Whatever it may be, is certain to be beautiful," he said with

much sincerity, "and I hope that it will make up to him for all his long spell in the dark."

Elmède's reply showed that she, too, had been visited by self-reproach. "You will hardly believe that anybody could be so selfish, Denis Maine," she said, looking at him sadly, "but do you know that I have been all this while thinking less of his happiness than of Destran's absence. It seems so very unfortunate that he should not be here just now. And I know that he cannot have intended to stay away such a long time."

"We miss him horribly, of course," said Denis; "but travelling where he is, he could not possibly count upon returning at any very definite date." Destran's injunction to explain matters if he failed to re-appear punctually was in Denis's mind, but he thought that the moment had not yet come to do more than give a hint.

"What troubles me," said Elmède, "is not merely missing him; there is something more—something perhaps that exists only in my own imagination—but I'll tell you about it. Of course I would say nothing to Avril or my brother.



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Ever since Destran's letter came I have felt as if he and I were parted by some strange barrier, unlike anything that has come between us before, although he has often been far away. I cannot describe it, still less explain it, but the feeling seems to have taken possession of me. And oh, Denis Maine, it sometimes fills me with terror lest it should be a sign that he will return no more—that he has passed away from us. For I keep thinking, and thinking, yet no other reason can I see."

"Have you thought of the cliff-wall out yonder?" Denis said, pointing seaward.

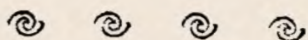
Elmède started. "The cliff-wall? It is such long ages since there have been any attempts to pass those cliffs; indeed, I had forgotten to take them into consideration. It is hardly necessary. But why do you ask? Have you any reason to suppose that he intended to make the attempt?"

"I have," said Denis.

"And that he has succeeded?" said Elmède.

"As to that," said Denis, "I *know* no more than you do yourself. I only draw inferences

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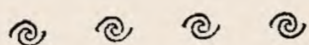
from what you say, and from what passed before he started. But to tell you the truth, I believe that he has got through them."

"Then you told him of some secret way," she said.

"I did help him to it, though not intentionally," said Denis. "I think you must curse the day that I came into your country," he added bitterly.

"No, no, indeed," Elmède said, looking round at him with a smile, which, however, had not reached her eyes. "You have brought us wonderful hopes, and this journey of Destran's may help to confirm them. No doubt he had some urgent reason for going, only it does seem rather strange that he should have left us just now, and without telling us of his plans. *Acril* would have wished to know beforehand."

Her tone was hurt, and her eyes were sad in spite of herself, and something in Denis's mind urged him strongly to hold his tongue, and by all means let them stay so. "It is all for the best, maybe," this being exhorted him, "if she is vexed



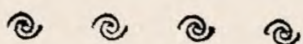
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with Destran. How can you be sure that either of them really cares enough about the other to prevent you from having a chance? Most likely, too, she will be offended with you if you say anything. Don't meddle or make, but just let things take their course."

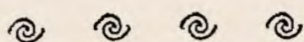
But it spoke vainly to a person who laboured under the delusion that a sorrowful cloud on Elmède's face threw a shadow over the whole world, and should be dispelled forthwith at any cost or risk. He said, hardly pausing to hear the remonstrance out, or to pick his words warily: "Dear Elmède, I am quite sure that you wouldn't think it strange if you knew all, and certainly you would not blame him. It was to spare you anxiety that he kept silence; and I well know how wholly his chief hope in going on this expedition is that it may bring you yourself the greatest possible happiness. He would set no object before that; if you doubt this, you mistake him, for his devotion to you—forgive my plain speaking—is complete."

Again Elmède smiled, and this time her eyes

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brightened in their darkness as if dew had flashed upon pansies. "He wants to bring the good news himself," she said, laughing softly. "It seems to me, Denis Maine, that you are not a very expert keeper of secrets. You must have told Destran something that made him wildly impatient, or he would have waited till Lynmarch saw again. And I wish he had," she said, growing grave, "I wish he had, for I can't help dreading to think that he is really at the other side of those terrible mountains, and has crossed the space which nobody else, except yourself, has ever crossed before. Still, it is an infinite relief to account in this way for that mysterious feeling. And I am sure that you would never have put it in his power to go where he could be separated from us for very long, or come to any harm. Indeed, when I think of what is before us, I could not be discontented with any degree of reasonableness. To-morrow or next day my brother will be in the light again, and then soon after we shall have Destran with us, and shall all know, thanks



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to you and to him, what will give our lives the meaning that we have always sought for, and the one assurance that we want to make us perfectly content. It seems to me as if we had at last found the door and might well have the patience to wait for the person who is presently going to turn the key."

To this Denis answered neither yea nor nay, an omission which she evidently did not notice. He could not bring himself to say anything that would quench her sparkle of happiness, nor could he reconcile it with his conscience to strengthen the kindling illusion. In excuse he said to himself that it would have been impossible for him to remove her mistrust about Destran without increasing her equally groundless confidence in his own mission as a bearer of good tidings.

She remained silent for a while, as if lost in a blissful reverie, and then she said: "You mustn't forget your promise to play for me on the strand as soon as my brother can spare us. We only put off our going, you know, and in a

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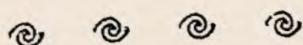
day or two there will be no longer anything to hinder us."

It seemed to Denis that Elmède was not entirely unabashed as she made this transparently disingenuous suggestion, designed, he nothing doubted, to conceal her true motive for journeying seaward. The speedy breakdown of her professed patience likewise had about it a charming absurdity to which its more tragical aspects did not blind him, and he inwardly smiled at it "with a light and a heavy heart." As for the expedition itself, he was right willing to undertake it, and they settled that they would go in two or three days. "Unless, of course," Elmède added, "Destran should come back first."

"In that case," Denis said, "you will care for music no more."

"On the contrary," said Elmède, "I hope and trust that I shall thenceforward think it the most lovely thing in the world."

With that they went into the house. Denis was wondering whether he had acted for the best during that interview. On the whole he



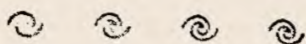
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thought that he had been loyal to Destran, and had reconciled Elmède, for a time at least, to her lover's emigration. As Denis watched her walk away, tall and slender, towards the amber-lighted entrance at one end of the long, dim corridor he said to himself: "I daresay she is imagining Destran in some transfigured version of the most enchanting place she knows. And at the present moment he may be in a mangrove swamp making the acquaintance of a blue-faced baboon."

The notion of this encounter took possession of his mind with grotesque persistency and returned that night to haunt his dreams.

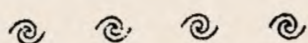
Next morning, at sunrise, the west was all turreted with still, magnificent cloud-masses, piled high, solemn, and sombre, or glistening snow-white from base to summit, and enfolding shadowy recesses full of awe. They lightened and thundered as they began to float slowly by; and then a great rush of rain came sweeping over the woodlands, and closed round the house, a murmurous pavilion. Denis, who had got up to see the pomp of the storm, could not have

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told whether he took more joy in the procession of vapours darkening and illuming the valleys and rolling echoes to far-off distances, or in the one spacious sound of the rain, that was swelled ever multitudinously from a myriad newly fed sources. But when the morning advanced towards noon, and the mounting sun furred up the cloud-canopy before him through the skies, until a waft of wind scattered it in torn shreds, the glory of the golden light enmeshed a world where the pellucid air quivered and shimmered, intermingling the voices of dancing waters with the pure hues and odours of the radiant earth, so that all things seemed touched with new spells of enchantment. Denis said to himself that this strange land looked more Paradisaical than ever.

Elmède and he were at this time out in the pleasance, but apart, for when he had first espied her she was writing in a little book, and he had kept aloof lest he should interrupt her. A starry hedge of jasmin screened her from him, as she sat under a citron tree. Presently he heard her

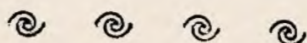


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utter a joyous exclamation, and call to him :
“ Denis Maine, here he is coming.” Denis hurried forward, surmising with relieved dismay Destran’s return ; and he saw with a less violent thrill of the same mixed feeling that it was Lynmarch who, accompanied by Avril, had appeared in the verandah. They were descending the steps which led down to the lawn, and were walking hand in hand, but plainly not because Lynmarch had any need of guidance, for in a moment he saw the other two, and, shouting blithely, set off running to meet them.

His sight, he and Avril explained, had come back to him suddenly while she was reading him a letter ; he had looked up, he said, and there was her head shining in the sun. After a hundred days of utter darkness, such a restoration to such a world might certainly quite account for the highest of spirits ; yet there was something beyond even this, Denis thought, in the supreme felicity which manifested itself in the countenances of Lynmarch and Avril. It caused him to think that Lynmarch’s eyes had lighted

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first upon what they were thenceforward most to prize. As Elmède seemingly shared in this opinion, the quartette tended always to split in two, for the benefit of a pair who were so much engrossed with each other that they did not observe how clearly their companions understood the situation.

In these circumstances Destran was perhaps both more and less missed than he would otherwise have been. Regret could scarcely be thought of in connection with Avril, who looked the very embodiment of happiness and youth. By this time Denis had begun to unlearn the habit of expecting to see time's woeful handiwork wrought on any of his acquaintances, and had found by experience that the words "young" and "old" had very small significance here, where the age of grown-up people was so trivial a matter that few persons could tell their own without reference to documents, and no one could have imagined any reason for concealing, if they chanced to know it. So that in spite of her relationship to Destran, her aspect and mien did



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not strike Denis as incongruous. But he read a little ruefulness, as if at the turning over of a pleasant page, in Elmède's expression, and he knew instinctively that her thoughts were more than ever with the absent.

That day sped by swiftly. To Denis's relief nothing was said about his own affairs. When dusk had fallen, however, and they were all watching the moon rise from a palm-plumed hill, which was moated by a lake, Lynmarch said to him : " I have been considering the matter for the last few days, Maine, and have come to the conclusion that though it's a great pity Destran shouldn't be here, the interests of this book of ours forbid any further delay in learning all that you can tell us. So, if you agree, this is what I propose to do. To-morrow I'll go over to Lindenwood, away beyond the mountains yonder, and bring back with me my friend Verendel, one of our ablest men of science ; then the next day we shall devote to hearing your account of the world beyond the Barrier."

" And I have a presentiment that Destran will

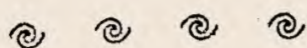
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have come back in the meanwhile," Avril added ; " at least I feel as if something delightful were going to happen, and I can't think of anything else to wish for."

The argument was naturally less convincing to Denis than to herself. Still, in his extremely perplexed state of mind, and the fatalistic mood, which it engendered, the certain evil of diminishing her happy confidence by the tidings that Destran had gone so much farther afield than she supposed, seemed to outweigh any probable good results from imparting that intelligence, and he acquiesced in Lynmarch's plan without demur. A dull despair of averting the dreaded disclosure had settled down on him, and he assented indifferently, as though he were abandoning a bootless struggle against destiny.

But his apathy vanished when, soon afterwards, on their way home, Elméde said to him : " Shall we go to the strand to-morrow ? " And he discussed their plans with a feeling that, come what would, he must have this one more perfect day. He resolved to banish every thought of

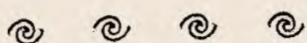


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the days, sadly imperfect, that would follow. To do this, however, proved to be beyond his powers. Such exiles restore themselves promptly and persistently.

* * * * *

WHEN he found himself alone in his room the echoes of Elmède's voice, sweet and low, as she talked eagerly of the morrow's journey, were driven away by the harsh strains of prophecies risen up to discourse of the sorrow towards which she was unawares drawing so near, and which it would be his office to bring upon her. Vividly, ruthfully, did he forecast the moment when she would hear what he had to tell. Even if the blackest features of it could remain concealed from her, bitter he knew would be her disappointment at the fading of her cherished dreams. And beyond this loomed vague and vast an adumbration of the shadow which the knowledge he bore must needs fling over the lives of all whom it reached. A sorry requital indeed for the hospitality accorded to him by

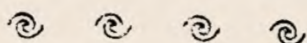


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this people, of whom, he thought, he had not met one but had shown him some kindness. For comfort he could only fall back upon the view suggested by Destran that his statements might be regarded as the ravings of a lunatic ; poor consolation at the best, and, such as it was, deprived of its likelihood by the prospect of Destran's return with the same lamentable tidings.

At last, perceiving that he could not find refuge in sleep, he went out into the veiled moonlight, which filled the lawns and glades with the soft, pure shining of a pearl. The sound of the river rushing by, full and swift, drew him to its banks, and he followed its windings for a long way through a forest of cedar and pine. He knew that it was tributary to a great stream which flowed into the sea. Round the sweep of a wide curve he came to a place where the bank rose up high above the stream, and overlooked a long reach of it, threading a level prairie, faintly green in the dim, silvery night. Just below where he stood the shadow of the steep cliff lay on the water, which slid past in

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smooth, dark folds, silent and strong, with broad interspaces. Suddenly, as he watched them well past and past, the thought came to him that if one of them lapt him about, and swept him away with it to be no more seen, it might remove the peril of many evil days from all who dwelt in this lovely, sleeping land. It was a thought that he would gladly have dismissed without consideration ; but it would not be dealt with thus. The truth it contained spoke too loud to let conscience turn a deaf ear. And against it the only valid plea that he could urge was the possibility of Destran's return to make his own effacement of no avail. That, however, was a mere chance, and in any case he could not doubt that his presence there to amplify and corroborate the other's report must enormously increase the perniciousness of it all.

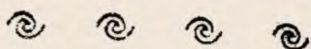
True it was, indeed, that if personal arguments against such a step had not been barred, he could have brought them forward in abundance. Besides the general instinct "that makes frail flesh to shun the bitter wave," he had many



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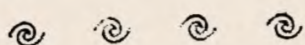
particular reasons for shrinking from summary burial beneath those dark, hurrying waters. Perhaps the objection that stood out most prominently in his mind was that he would thereby forfeit the morrow's journeying with Elmède. On that his heart was set vehemently and passionately. Obviously it suggested at least postponement of the irrevocable deed ; but to this compromise his conscience rejoined that postponement would be fatal to his purpose. Here was his opportunity, and he must seize it now or never ; here lay his path of duty, and he must take it, or renounce it for ever more. Assuredly, the inward voice warned him, he would not return to it again if he now wandered away into that day with Elmède and his music, so intensely desired, and so hostile to every self-renouncing ordinance. Vainly did he protest that all he wanted was one more sight of Elmède, and once again to play her his mother's melody. Give him that, and he would be content to go. The answer to this came sternly and upbraidingly. If he would incur

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risks so grave for so mere a whim, how could he trust himself not to be led completely away from his present resolve by any trivial pretext that might arise? He should instead take example by Destran, who, having so much more to lose, had risked it all rather than deflect a ray of happiness from Elmède. An appeal to the spirit of emulation seldom entirely fails. It was with a sort of rage against permitting himself to be outdone in zeal on Elmède's behalf that Denis looked round upon the peaceful, friendly landscape, and straightway plunged into the dark-rolling stream below.

Heavily the cold weight of waters closed over his head, and unfathomably deep he felt himself to sink among them in the brief moment before life went out like an extinguished flame. And then—he seemed to waken from a quiet slumber, lying on soft, short grass with the river gurgling close to his ear. It had evidently but now been flowing over his couch, for all round lay scattered freshly snapped-off wet sprays and boughs, and unanchored blossoms of water lilies, left there by

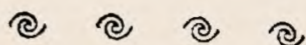


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the subsiding flood. One of his hands, in fact, was still touched occasionally by a passing ripple. He sat up, and recognised that his attempt had been a total failure ; the river had simply carried him down-stream for a while, until, falling away from this gently sloping margin, it had left him there safe and sound. Some hours must have elapsed, for the moon hung low, and a faint, ethereal rose tinged the hollow of the far east. A clear-feeling breeze bore odours of spice and balm. At his feet he saw lying a little broken branch, spoil of the wild waters. It had three glossy, wrinkled leaves on it, and a transparent pale-green, crescent-shaped fruit, which he plucked and ate. As he did so, a sense of frustration was very far from him. He was thinking that he must hasten home to be in time for the early start which he and Elmède had planned.

Since he had done his best to cut himself off from it utterly, and Fate had otherwise decreed, he might now look forward without self-reproach to the coming day ; and that he was to have a part in it after all appeared to him a good

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and pleasant thing. The conviction strengthened upon him as he made the best of his way back through the awakening dawn. Destiny, he thought, had been both wiser and kinder than conscience ; he was more than willing to leave henceforward the control of his affairs in her hands. That solitary walk was an altogether delightful experience. He had, for the time being at least, exorcised all his scruples and misgivings by his attempted felony, and he could give himself up to the enjoyment of anticipating a day spent with Elmède and his violin. The river, he found, had borne him so far that it was necessary for him to hasten, which he did with all his heart. By the time he reached the house, the whole world lay flushed with the morning, like a rose within a rose.

While the climbing sun was still slanting long rays through and through the woods, where the tallest trees were still dwarfed by their far-flung shadows, Elmède and Denis started on their journey to the strand. For the first part of the road they sped in a car, but when they had

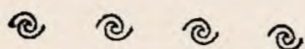


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passed the mountain-range, which lay between them and the sea, they travelled the rest of the way by water, rushing down a torrent stream, with their skiff ever poised on the crest of a forward darting wave, and pursued by weltering fury. It was a rapturous flight, wild as swift, all too soon ended, Denis felt, though the sun was high above them, and they had left behind them many a league, before they came swooping round a curve which brought them in sight of the quiet, dim blue, waiting to receive their turbulent white stream.

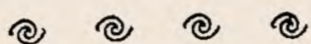
They had chosen it for their voyage because it was that along the banks of which Denis had first made his way into the country ; and because he and Destran had left at its mouth the curious canoe, which Elmède wished to see. The flooded river now foamed through the little dell into which he had hauled it that day ; but its moorings had held, and it was still safely afloat. A grove of stately trees, festooned with heavy-clustered vines, shaded a narrow tongue of land, moss-carpeted, against one shore of

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which seethed the fleeing river, while on the other lapped drowsily and rhythmically the tranquil tide. This seemed to Elmède and Denis a desirable resting-place for their noon, and hall for their concert ; so they disembarked, and walked along a pathway betwixt cool grey stems garlanded with translucent golden-green, until they came where a break in the beechen ranks made a leaf-framed casement for a glimpse of the wild water. It was separated from them by only a delicate margin of milk-white sand and the mosaic border of various-coloured small blossoms set in the deep moss. Drifts of the fragrant petal-shells filled every little hollow in a bank, which offered the pleasantest of shady seats.

Here they halted, and Elmède looked on with some awe as Denis opened his violin-case and took out his instrument, handling it as a miser might finger his golden hoard. Then when he set about tuning it, she moved off a few paces, and stood gazing far over the sea. Denis watched her, giving only a divided attention to his strings. A soft, faint haze brooded on the sky-line, im-

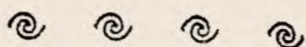


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penetrably veiling the utmost verge of the horizon. Yet he could see that she was gazing thitherward, steadily, intently, as if she hoped to pierce its baffling dimness. He knew well what traveller she was wishing to behold emerge from it, and he knew also that, earnestly as she longed to hear this traveller's tale, the mere sight of him returning would be for her a joy swallowing up every other. The dissonance between her hopes and his own, nay, even between some of the latter among themselves, seemed suddenly to put the whole world out of tune in a way that no adjustment of intervals could remedy. In quest of an alleviation, he quickly finished his screwing up and down, and began to play.

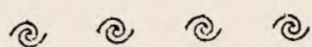
But he was mortified to perceive that she did not apparently notice the change from the little chaos which he had been creating to the nobly ordered phrases of a great master. He played on for some time, taking less pleasure in it than perhaps he had ever done before, so bent was he on diverting her from her wistful gaze to seawards, so vexed at his failure to win her ear.

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At last, in a mood perturbed enough to make him feel that he was almost committing sacrilege, he softly glided into the melody of a Dream in Sleep. Its soothing influence had hardly yet stolen over him, when he saw his purpose achieved. Elmède looked round, and then, turning away from the water's edge, came slowly towards him, and sat down beneath the shade of the tree where he stood playing. She was, he could see, listening with delight. And thereupon over his spirit fell a restful calm, that set him free once more to lose himself in the joy of parleying with the soul of music.

It would have been long before either the musician or his audience wearied ; and when at last Denis dropped his bow with a start, saying : " I wonder what length of time you have let me keep you waiting here," Elmède sighed like one roused from a heaven-lit trance, and answered dreamily : " You have been giving me a sight of enchanted regions, more beautiful than anything I ever had imagined. It seems to me as if we must be on the very verge of



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them here." She stood up, looked again far over the sea—"and what I am wondering, Denis Maine, is how you could endure to leave them."

"Ah, Elmède," said Denis, "I'm afraid that we are still far enough away from what you have the picture of in your mind."

But his warning appeared to be lost upon her, so much pre-occupied was she indeed with this picture. The dim rounding haze continued to fascinate her, and presently, as she gazed into it, she spoke another thought aloud, "I fear that it may be a long time before he cares to come back to us."

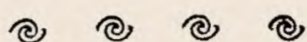
A jarring pang which accompanied his all too certain identification of the pronoun stung Denis into hasty speech: "Then we shall have to go and find him ourselves," he said abruptly, compressing into words a fantastic day-dream that had once hovered before him vague and nebulous. To flee away with Elmède beyond the Barrier, and face life with her in the old world, had been a vision in which he sometimes took refuge from the intolerable prospect of becoming a har-

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binger of woe to this strange, fair-fortuned land. To do him justice, even before his discovery of Elmède's and Destran's attachment forbade him any longer to dwell upon it, he would have shrunk from the realisation of a dream so heaven-defying in its selfishness. But now he suddenly conceived the possibility of in a small measure carrying out that project. Elmède might never be his, yet if she willed it so, how could he refuse the task of bringing her to the other side? And their enterprise could, of course, stop at any distance short of that. Suppose she wished to see the effect of his music on the cliff-wall without passing through? Or merely to make the voyage on the chance of falling in with Destran? With such pretexts and modifications he justified his words, conscious the while that he had spoken prompted by a desire just to feel himself drifting away across that serene blue water with Elmède by his side.

As for Elmède, he believed at first that she was startled by the suggestion, because her colour came and went, and she hesitated before she



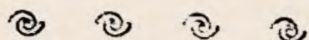
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replied. But then she looked straight at him with shining eyes and said : " To tell you the truth, what I have been hoping that we might do is to sail out yonder and try to get a sight of the cliff-wall. I know it isn't at all likely that we could reach it in our little boat, but even the attempt would be very interesting, and there's the chance that we might meet Destran on his way home. Though while you were playing I felt it somehow almost wrong to wish that he would hurry back."

" We could go in the canoe," said Denis. " She has made the voyage twice with so much success that I think she must be a lucky craft. And you can have no idea how well music sounds out on the water," he added, less as an inducement to her than as a salve to his own conscience ; " you will hear that, even if we go only a little way."

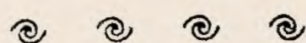
" It would be delightful," said Elmède. She had reseated herself under the tree, and was gathering a bunch of slender-stalked, rose-coloured bells, which quivered fragrantly in the grass.

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"I think it must be the music," she said, "that has made me so wonderfully happy. It seems to have driven away every sort of anxiety and fear, or rather to have shown clearly that there is no room for them anywhere. How should they exist, when in truth our whole life sets towards happiness like a tide of the sea, and when we are all in the sway of a great Power, lifting us up from height to height of beauty and joy? I shall never again dread the Music of the Mist, for your little music, that is a far-off echo of it, has a human voice, and it says that we shall have our heart's desire beyond. And surely there is nothing in the wide world to gainsay it except ignorance, and to that I will listen no more, for it is just a foolish fancy. How foolish I shall understand by-and-by, when we hear what you and Destran have to tell us. But in the meanwhile your music on the water will be lovely."

This deluded speech at first stirred in Denis an impulse to very bitter mockery of himself as a hopeful future evangelist, but it was speedily

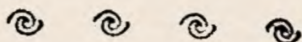


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checked by a thrill of the pity which dwells in the sorrow-shadow of love, and which now made him look with a grieved and foreboding heart at Elmède, smiling softly over her flowers. A reply was very difficult to frame, and he evaded the point by seeming to be absorbed in putting up his violin, and slinging it over his shoulders. "I'll go and fetch the canoe," he said, when he had finished ; "she's lying close by, and I can paddle her round in a minute."

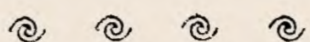
With that he turned away, and walked down the grove, where the bright water blinked through the boughs on either hand. Troubles encompassed him, many and bewildering, but they were all insignificant compared with the rough waking of Elmède from her dream. Only one way of averting this seemed open to him, and that was to bring her home again, and then leave her for ever. The end of that way would be desolation for himself ; still he thought he could follow it. He would return to the old world, with its memories and loneliness, and this strange land should be as if he had never set foot on

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its shores, for as he made the resolve the conviction came to him that Destran would assuredly not fall short of him in self-effacement, and would at any cost refrain from re-appearing, a bearer of baneful tidings. Grieve as Elmède must, it should not be over the slaying of her faith and hope ; from that she would be safe.

Thus meditating, he unmoored the little boat, and spread the brown sail. As he glided slowly along the silvery margin of the grove he became aware that another boat was just putting in at the further end of it, and a moment later he saw a figure spring on shore. The greenery obstructed his view, but soon an open space let him perceive that it was Destran. Almost unrecognisable, indeed, aged, haggard, with an expression of horror on his countenance, yet Destran beyond a doubt. He was hurrying towards the place where a gleam of Elmède's white gown appeared among the trees ; and now Denis, drifting on, saw her rise up and hasten to meet the new-comer. Like one spellbound



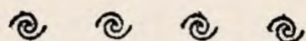
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and helpless in an evil dream he watched them approach each other ; a moment more and they would meet, nay, they had clasped hands—Elmède, radiant at the gate of her Paradise, and the wanderer aghast from earth's doleful habitations.

Then suddenly the strains of an ineffable harmony, flooding the world far and wide, penetrating, pervasive ; the baffling, inscrutable dimness gathering softly and swiftly, folding upon itself, thrilled for an instant with the azure dawn-glow, and vanished, none could say how or whither ; and Denis was alone. The sunbeams that pierced the leaf-lattices of the grove shone on no living creature. Once more he had witnessed the coming and going of the Music of the Mist.

For a while he sat gazing blankly at nothing, in no degree realising what had happened. When his mind stirred again, his first thought was : “ She never knew.” And after a pause : “ It would be a pity if any of them ever knew,” he said to himself, though without feeling at all

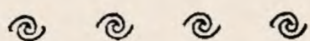
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that it was really so, as he began to steer away from the strand.

Dusk had fallen when he came to the foot of the black cliff-wall, through which his Dream in Sleep melody once more cleft him a passage, and dusk was still brooding on the other side, when the seething whirl had ceased behind him, and had left him afloat on calm water. He looked about in the dimness, and fancied that something faintly grey was vanishing in the far distance, so indistinct as to be possibly either cliff or cloud. Before him lay the coast, near enough to show here and there a tufted palm-cluster or the square, white fleck of a plastered hut. Its aspect had in no way altered since the evening so long ago.

Was it actually long ago, he suddenly wondered, or had he just been dreaming wildly and vividly? That was a question he could not immediately answer, and when he had considered it for a short while, the idea occurred to him that he might never be able to answer it at all. The adventure, if adventure it were, had brought

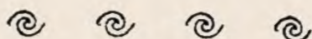


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him back so exactly to the point at which it had begun—hour, place, plight, all precise as they had been. Here he was in the quaint little canoe ; there lay his violin in its case ; he had neither lost nor gained any of his few small properties. For many days before he had crossed, sleeping or awake, the mysterious Barrier he had lost count of time, wandering in uncivilised regions, so that he would have no means of determining by dates what interval had elapsed ; and the barbarous strangers in the native villages could not enlighten him, even were he not unable to frame an inquiry intelligibly.

These reflections were hazily in his mind as the canoe drifted shorewards, without any guidance from him, and they seemed to blur everything with additional vagueness. He felt dull and listless, and very loth to set about the business of living. A lean, doggish creature, that was gnawing some foul thing on the beach, left off at the sound of his approach to show its teeth and snarl at him. As the prow grated on the shingle, since “fortune brings in some boats that

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are not steered," a fleeting vision of Elmède's face rose up before him, and roused him from his apathy. "It is a mistake," he said to himself, "on the whole a mistake, to waken out of a dream."

The End

